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THE CASTLE OF ZION

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CEDARS FOR THE BUILDING OF THE CASTLE

THE CASTLE OF ZION

Stories from the Old Testament

BY

GEORGE HODGES

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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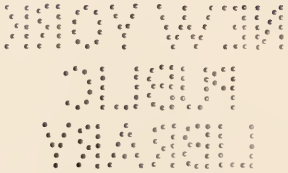

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TO

Elisabeth and Richard

CONTENTS

I.	The Castle of Zion	1
II.	The Runner and the Spear	6
III.	Under the Fifth Rib	10
IV.	The Little Lame Prince	15
V.	The Ambassadors' Beards	20
VI.	In the Front of the Battle	24
VII.	The Wise Woman of Tekoa	28
VIII.	"I will be King!" says Absalom	33
IX.	"I will be King!" says Adonijah	39
X.	The Baby and the Sword	44
XI.	The Queen of Sheba	47
XII.	Ten Torn Pieces	53
XIII.	The Prophet and the Lion	57
XIV.	The Sparing of Benhadad	62
XV.	A Handful of Meal	67
XVI.	The Fire and the Rain	70
XVII.	The Still, Small Voice	76
XVIII.	Naboth's Vineyard	80
XIX.	The Chariot of Fire	84
XX.	The Prophet and the Prophets	89

CONTENTS

XXI.	"My Head! My Head!"	95
XXII.	The Captain and the River	100
XXIII.	The Siege of Samaria	105
XXIV.	The Wild Ride of Jehu	110
XXV.	The Prince's Grandmother	115
XXVI.	The Shepherd and the City	119
XXVII.	The Prodigal Wife	125
XXVIII.	Whistling for the Bees	129
XXIX.	The God of the Land	134
XXX.	The Wolf and the Fold	137
XXXI.	The Burned Book	142
XXXII.	The Capture of the Castle	147
XXXIII.	Moving Pictures	152
XXXIV.	The Master of the Magicians	158
XXXV.	The Fiery Furnace	164
XXXVI.	Belshazzar's Feast	168
XXXVII.	The Den of Lions	172
XXXVIII.	The Hanging of Haman	177
XXXIX.	The Castle Wall	184
XL.	The Adventures of Jonah	190
XLI.	The Patience of Job	196

ILLUSTRATIONS

Cedars for the building of the castle *Frontispiece*
After the drawing by Gustave Doré in La Sainte Bible, Tours, 1866.

Nathan reproves David 26

The man who stoned the king 34

Long live King Solomon! 42

Gifts from the Queen of Sheba 48

You shall be King over Israel 54

The little lad lives again 98

The desolated city 148

Out of the captured castle 152

Whom the king delighteth to honour 172

In peril of attack 186

Job's comforters 198
After drawings by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld in Die Bibel in Bildern, Leipzig, 1860.

THE CASTLE OF ZION

I

THE CASTLE OF ZION

T stood on one of the summits of a double hill. The hill lay on the land like two fingers of a clenched fist. East and south and west were deep valleys: on the north was a stout wall. Sometimes the castle was called Zion, which means the "Top of the Hill." Sometimes it was called Jerusalem, which means the "City of Peace." And this name it had because it seemed secure from all the ills of war. Armies had beaten against it for centuries, as the waves of the sea beat against a high rock.

It was not only a castle, but a city. There people lived in their quiet houses, and carried on their business under the protection of the garrison; as they do to-day at Gibraltar in the shadow of the fort. And the commander of the castle was a king.

One time there were found in Egypt, on a bank of the Nile, the ruins of an ancient city. In the midst of the city

stood a royal palace, and beside the palace stood a royal library: the palace and library of Tel el Amarna. In this library were found three hundred letters. They were written, as was the manner in those days, on bricks or tablets of clay, and so had endured through all the weather of more than three thousand years. Many of these letters were written to the king of Egypt by the king of Jerusalem. "The Castle of Zion," he said, "is in peril. Wild people are coming across the Jordan from the deserts, and are threatening us on every side. Send reinforcements."

Then years passed, and Abraham was returning one day from a victorious battle. A band of robbers had plundered Sodom, where Abraham's nephew Lot lived, and had carried away Lot and other people, and all the spoil on which they could lay their hands. Abraham had chased them, and rescued Lot and his friends out of their camp. On his return, the king of Jerusalem, named Melchizedek, came out to meet him, bringing bread and wine to refresh him.

Then years passed, and years passed, and Joshua came into the land. He came out of the deserts and over the Jordan, like the people about whom the king of Jerusalem had written to the king of Egypt. There were great battles, and the king of Jerusalem of that day was one of the commanders against Joshua. Instead of bringing bread and

wine, he brought swords and clubs. But Joshua was victorious. The five opposing kings fled, and hid themselves in a cave, and Joshua captured them. He had his captains put their feet on the necks of these royal prisoners. Then he took the kings and hanged them on five trees, the king of Jerusalem among them. But, even then, he did not take Jerusalem. The Castle of Zion stood frowning on its lofty rock, and nobody could come near it.

Thus it stood through all the years while the Jews were conquering the country. Deborah and Gideon and Jephthah fought their splendid battles, but they did not take the fortress on the top of the hill. And Saul became king, and fought with the Amalekites and with the Philistines, and died at last in battle, but the Castle of Zion remained still in the hands of the ancient people of the land, the Jebusites, whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers had held it before them.

At last came David.

Now, David had about him a force of mighty men. They laughed at danger, and believed that difficulties were things to be overcome. They loved to swim across flooded rivers, and to meet lions in caves. They would rather fight than eat. Among these heroes were three of David's nephews. Their mother was his sister, and she had brought them up

in such a way that they did not know how fear felt. One day, David was fighting with a giant who was worse than Goliath, a vast and mighty man named Ish-bi-be-noth. And Ish-bi-be-noth had a huge spear in one hand, and a new sword in the other, fresh from the forge, and he made at David with such force that had he had but one more chance to strike, the head of David would have rolled upon the ground. But one of the nephews, Abishai, came to the rescue. Another nephew, Asahel, was as light of foot as a wild roe on the mountains; but he never ran away from danger. The third was Joab.

David sent word to the garrison of the Castle of Zion, and called upon them to surrender. They laughed at him. They said, "Come and take our fortress, if you can. We keep no guard. The blind and the lame among us are enough to hold our walls against you." And they made up a company of blind men to watch for the appearing of David and a company of lame men to bring the news of his approach. Then they sat down to eat and drink.

So David called his mighty men together. "Here," he said, "is an adventure to-day which shall have a rich reward. He who shall find a way into the Castle of Zion, and shall be the first to enter there, shall be the chief and captain of you all. He shall be the man of my right hand."

This adventure Joab undertook.

It was like the capture of Quebec, when Wolfe and his men climbed the narrow path out of the steep valley, and were found in the dawn of the morning on the Plains of Abraham. Up climbed Joab and his soldiers in the night along the watercourse, and surprised the garrison. The stout soldiers of the castle suddenly found the enemy upon them. Thus David won the ancient fortress. Joab became the captain of the army, and Jerusalem became the capital of the Jewish people.

II

THE RUNNER AND THE SPEAR

UT of the battle in which King Saul was killed, one important man escaped alive. That was the general, Abner. Abner had sat on the king's right hand at the royal table, and had shared the king's tent in the camp. Now that the king was dead, it seemed right to Abner that the king's son should sit upon his throne. Accordingly, he gathered together so much of the army as was left after the battle, and declared that the king was Saul's son, Ishbosheth. But many of the people wished to have David for their king.

So there was war between the tribes, the men of the north being for Saul's son, and the men of the south for David. The leader on the side of Ishbosheth was Abner: the leader on David's side was Joab.

The two armies came at last so close together that they were parted only by a pond of water, the Pool of Gibeon. And they sat down, and looked at each other across the narrow water. Then Abner said to Joab, "Let us not set

the armies in array, and kill a thousand men in a needless battle. Let us have a tournament, and fight by champions. You choose twelve knights on your part, and we will choose twelve knights on our part, and they shall decide between us." And to this, Joab agreed.

So the lists were set, and the champions were chosen, and out came the knights in armor, twelve on each side; and every man had in his hand a shining sword. Then at the sound of a trumpet, on they rushed and met in the middle of the lists, while the two armies watched. And each man with his left hand seized his opponent by the hair, and with his right hand thrust his sword into his side. And they fell down together and not one of the twenty-four got up again. Thus neither side had the mastery of the other, and the armies had to fight. And in the battle, Abner and his men were beaten and began to run, and Joab's men ran after them.

Now the best runner in the army of Joab was his brother, Asahel. On he ran as a wild deer runs across a plain. All his companions were soon left behind him; before him, down the road, was Abner. Paying no attention to any lesser person, and turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, straight he sped after the fleeing general. So Abner heard the sound of following feet, and looked behind him.

"Is that you, Asahel?" he said.

And Asahel answered, "It is I."

Then Abner said, "Asahel, you have no armor. Seize some soldier, and take his spoil and arm yourself."

But Asahel replied, "I am well enough armed to kill you, Abner."

So on they ran, Asahel gaining on Abner.

"Come," cried Abner to Asahel, "turn aside from pursuing me. Why should I smite you to the ground? How, then, could I look your brother Joab in the face again?"

But that made no difference. On ran Asahel, sword in hand, after the life of Abner. Then Abner took his long spear, and just as Asahel was about to strike him, he thrust it back and struck Asahel so that the spear went through his body. And down he fell, and died. Then came the great company of the pursuers, following behind, and there lay Asahel dead. And they cried out in bitter lamentation and pushed on, chasing Abner.

At last, Abner and his men came to the top of a little hill, and there stood with their faces to their foes. And Abner, who had tried twice that day to avoid the shedding of blood, tried yet again. Abner called to Joab. "Shall the sword devour," he said, "forever? When will you call your people back from pursuing us, your brethren?"

And Joab said, "Abner, I had intended to chase you all night long, but because of your request I will make the pursuit to cease."

So Joab blew a trumpet, and his men stood still, and the fight was over.

Then Abner and his men walked all that night across the plain, and did not rest till they had put the river Jordan between them and their enemies. And Joab took up his brother Asahel, and buried him in the grave of their father, which was in Bethlehem.

III

UNDER THE FIFTH RIB

VERY day, David and Joab grew stronger. More and more men enlisted under their banner to help them in their great fight for the throne. But Ishbosheth and Abner grew continually weaker. Then Abner and Ishbosheth had a quarrel.

One day, Ishbosheth said to Abner, "Why have you done thus and so?"

And Abner answered in fierce anger, "Am I a dog's head that you pull me about by the ears and beat me? Am I not fighting your battles against David? Have I not been your friend, and your only strong support? But understand me now, I am done. From this hour, I fight no more. I will make David king."

And Ishbosheth dared not answer him a word, for he was afraid of him.

So Abner went over to confer with David, and a bodyguard of twenty valiant men went with him. And Abner said, "Make a league of peace with me, and I will set you on

the throne of Israel. I will forsake Ishbosheth, and bring you all my soldiers."

And David said, "I will make a league of peace with you on one condition. Michal, my wife, Saul's daughter, is living in your court. She must be brought back to me."

For it was the hand of the Princess Michal which David had won by his victory over Goliath; and it was she who had helped David to escape from her father Saul, letting him down out of a window. But since then many years had passed, and many things had happened. David had married again two or three times, according to the custom of the country, and Michal had been married also. But David wanted to be king, and he felt that the fact that he was the husband of Saul's daughter would make many people feel that it was right that he should be Saul's successor.

Anyhow he demanded Michal; and Abner sent at once and fetched her, much against her will: and behind her came her husband, weeping, till Abner told him to go back.

Then David made a league of peace with Abner, and he spread a feast for Abner and his twenty men. And when the feast was over, Abner said to David, "Now I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel unto my lord, the king."

And David answered, "Go in peace."

And Abner took his leave, and went.

Now Joab was not present at the feast of peace. He was off that day chasing a rich caravan to rob them of their goods, and when he and his men came back, shouting and singing, with their arms full of plunder, the supper was over and the guests were gone. But some of Joab's friends told him what had taken place.

"Abner came," they said, "while you were gone, and feasted with the king, and is even now departing to his home in peace."

So Joab went to David in great anger. "What have you done?" he said. "I hear that Abner came, and that you received him as a friend, and feasted him, and let him go in peace. Do you not know that the man is our enemy? Could you not see that he came as a spy to examine your camp and your army? Who killed Asahel, my brother and your nephew? Have you forgotten that? Whose hands are red with the blood of Asahel? Peace? You should have taken his miserable head from off his shoulders."

And David was silent, for he was almost as afraid of Joab as Ishbosheth was afraid of Abner.

Then Joab sent messengers after Abner, and they found him resting by the way, sitting beside a well in the shadow of the trees. "David," they said, "wishes to speak with you again." And Abner turned back, thinking no evil. So he

came to the gate of the city, and there was Joab waiting. Even then Abner, in the honesty of his heart, suspected no danger."

"Come here, Abner," said Joab, "I have a word to say to you." Then, when they were come into a quiet place, and the two commanders were alone together, suddenly Joab drew his sword and smote Abner under the fifth rib, and killed him.

Now when Ishbosheth heard the evil tidings, — that General Abner had deserted to David, and that he had been put to death, — his hands fell to his sides as the hands of one who is faint and full of fear. He knew that this was the end of all his hopes. His soldiers began to leave their tents, and to make their way across the river to the camp of David. Even in the court, everybody was now considering how he might best save his own life, and advance his own fortunes.

In the middle of a hot day, Ishbosheth, who had been awake all night, went to his room and lay down upon his bed to get a bit of sleep. An old woman sat outside to keep the door. She had a pile of wheat beside her, and she was separating the grain from the chaff to make bread for Ishbosheth's dinner; but in the heat of the drowsy day, she fell asleep. Then came two fierce men, and opened the un-

guarded door, and when they came out they brought the head of Ishbosheth with them.

The two men took Ishbosheth's head, and leaving the old woman still asleep, away they went as fast as they could go. All that night, they ran across the plain; in the morning they forded the river, still with their dreadful burden in their hands; and they at last came to David.

"Here," they cried, "is the head of your enemy Ishbosheth." And they looked for a reward.

But David's soul was filled with grief and anger. It was to him a bitter thing that his way to the throne should thus lie across the dead bodies of his nephew, Asahel, and his old friend, Abner, and his brother-in-law, the Prince Ishbosheth. So the reward of the murderers was given them on the edge of a sharp sword.

But the war was ended, and David was the king of all the men of Israel.

IV

THE LITTLE LAME PRINCE

T was the nurse's fault that the prince was lame. One day his grandfather, King Saul, and his father, Jonathan, were away in battle. They were fighting the Philistines at Mount Gilboa. Little Mephibosheth, five years old, was at home playing with his toys as happily as if the dreadful game of war had never been invented; and the nurse was taking care of him. Suddenly appeared a messenger out of the battle, running and weeping as he ran, with his clothes torn and dust upon his head.

"The Philistines have won the day!" he cried. "Saul is dead, Jonathan is dead! All is lost. Flee, flee for your lives!"

The nurse picked up Mephibosheth, and set him on her shoulder, and ran to save his life and hers. And in the hurry and confusion, scared so that she could scarcely see, she stumbled and fell. Of course, the little boy fell with her; and in the fall he broke his ankles. There was no doctor there to set the broken bones, and the result was that he

never walked again. He was carried safely out of the reach of the Philistines, but he was lame for life. There he was, then, his mother dead, his father slain in battle, his home destroyed, and he himself a little crippled child.

Mephibosheth was taken away across the Jordan to Lo-debar, among the mountains of Gilead, where a good man named Machir had a farm. So the prince grew up on the farm. Machir gave him a home, and he had Machir's sunburned sons for brothers. He became acquainted with sheep and cows, and watched the men as they gathered the harvests of wheat and barley, and the women as they made bread and cheese and butter, and the bees as they filled their hives with honey. But he could handle neither scythe nor flail. He could only sit still and shell the beans, and tend the churn, and keep the cakes from burning, like a girl. By and by, he learned to ride, from place to place about the farm, upon an ass's back, and he could drive the cows to pasture. But he was very unhappy. "How miserable I am," he said, "with my lame feet; how useless, good for nothing!"

Sometimes he rode as far as Mahanaim, where his uncle, Ishbosheth, was trying hard to be king in the place of Saul. Then he wished that he might be a soldier, and fight for the fortunes of his royal house. He remembered how his father had named him Meribbaal, meaning the "Hero of the Lord,"

and had hoped that he would grow up to be as strong and courageous as himself. Then he looked at his feet. If anybody could have told him that his name would be written in history Mephibosheth, meaning "He-who-brings-shame," he would have said, "Yes, that is a more fitting name for me."

This desire to be a soldier was very great in the days when Ishbosheth's army was growing weaker and David's army was growing ever stronger. But at last a messenger came in haste and fear from the court at Mahanaim, and brought the dreadful news that Ishbosheth had been murdered in his bed, and that all the glory of the family of Saul was ended. That was a bitter time for the little lame prince, for he had hoped to leave the farm some day, and be a prince, indeed, and live in a palace. And not only was this expectation brought to naught, but in the death and ruin of his uncle, Ishbosheth, all of the little prince's property was lost. So he was not only lame but poor.

Now, when David became king, one of the first things which he thought of was an old promise. For one day, years before, he had been saved out of a great danger by his friend, Jonathan. David and Jonathan were such good friends that their affection has always been remembered. David said that there was nobody in the world whom he

loved as he did Jonathan. But Jonathan's father, Saul, was trying to kill David. Jonathan was protecting him. So they met in a field as David was escaping from the court, and Jonathan said, "David, I am a prince and you are an outlaw. I am rich and you are poor. But I look ahead into the future and see that all this shall be changed. You will be a great man when I and my father's house shall be brought to the ground. Promise me now, for the sake of our love, that when this shall come to pass you will be a friend to my sons, as I have been a friend to you." And David lifted up his hand, and promised. And Jonathan said, "Promise me again, so that you may never forget it." And he promised again.

And now David was the king of all the land, and the house of Saul had come to ruin. So David said, "Is there any left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for the sake of Jonathan?"

And somebody remembered the lame prince. And one said, "There is a son of Jonathan yet living, lame in both his feet."

And David said, "Go bring him here to me."

So they went to Lo-debar, to Machir's farm, and brought Mephibosheth. And the little prince came trembling. He remembered how his uncle's head had been cut off, and his

own head felt unsteady on his shoulders. He was carried in where David was, and he fell upon his knees before him and touched his forehead to the ground, and said, "Behold thy servant."

And David said, "Fear not, for I will surely show you kindness for your father's sake. All the royal lands will I restore to you, and you shall be my guest here all the days of your life."

And the prince said, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?"

And David raised him up, and kissed him, and he became as one of the king's sons. Thus, at last, the dreams of the little lame prince came true. He left the farm, and lived in the palace, and every day dined with the king.

V

THE AMBASSADORS' BEARDS

THERE was a new king on the throne of Ammon. The old king had come to the end of his long life, and his son reigned in his stead. And since the land of Ammon was near to the land of Israel, just across the river, it seemed to David that it would be polite and pleasant to condole with the new king concerning the death of his father, and to congratulate him that he had come to his father's throne. "We are both beginning the difficult business of being a king," he wished to say; "let us be friends."

So David chose a company of grave ambassadors, old men with long gray beards, and away they went upon this gracious errand to Rabbah, the royal city of the Ammonites.

Now the Ammonites and the Israelites, though they were neighbors and even cousins, had long been enemies. Once they had fought in the days of Jephthah; the time when Jephthah vowed to sacrifice whatever came first to meet him if he returned victorious, and was met by his own

daughter. Again they had fought in the days of Saul, at the time of the battle of the Right Eyes. So when the princes of the king of Ammon saw the ambassadors approaching, they warned the king.

"Put no trust," they said, "in David. He has not sent these messengers to honor the memory of your father, nor to make an honest league of peace with you. He has sent them to spy out the weak places in our walls, and to count the number of our soldiers, that he may send an army to destroy us."

And this warning the king heeded. He took the ambassadors and dealt very roughly with them. This is what he did. He shaved off half their beards, leaving each man with the right side of his face bearded, and the left side bare; and he cut off their long robes above their knees; and he and his princes stood and laughed at them.

Then he sent them home. And the ambassadors travelled by night, because they were ashamed to be seen. They might, indeed, have shaved the half of their beards that was left, but in those days all men wore beards. A man with a smooth face would have looked as queer to his neighbors as if he had dressed himself in the clothes of a child. All the boys would have called him names in the street.

At last, the ambassadors came to Jericho, and sent to

David to tell him what had happened. "The Ammonites laughed at us," they said, "till the tears ran down their cheeks."

"I will make the tears run down their cheeks," said David. So he prepared for the War of the Ambassadors' Beards.

Now when the Ammonites realized what they had done, they were sore afraid. They remembered what David had done already to their neighbors, the Moabites. For David had fought with the Moabites and conquered them, and he had made the soldiers lie upon the ground in three long lines; one line he had spared, and the other two he had put to death.

So the Ammonites sent to the Syrians, saying, "We are in great trouble. David is coming after us. Come now and help us, and we will give you gold and silver."

Thus when Joab brought the army of Israel, and attacked the Ammonites beside their city gate, the Syrians rushed up through the open country from behind, and attacked Joab. There was Joab between two enemies, in the front and in the rear.

Then Joab divided his army into two parts. One part he himself commanded: the other he put in charge of Abishai, his brother. "Abishai," he said, "you encounter the Ammonites; I will deal with the Syrians." And he addressed

the soldiers. "Be of good courage," he said, "and let us play the men for our people, and may the Lord give the victory to the better side!"

And Joab fell upon the Syrians, so that they fled into the country; and Abishai fell upon the Ammonites, so that they fled into the city.

That was the beginning of a war which continued till the army of Israel broke at last into the city of Ammon. And David came to take possession. And in the temple of the Ammonites he found a mighty idol which they called Milcom; and on Milcom's head was a heavy crown of pure gold, having in the midst a precious stone which shone like a star. This David took, and wore the jewel on his forehead.

As for the Ammonites, they became David's servants. He made them work for him, some with saws and picks and axes of iron, and some at making brick. Thus the kingdom of David began to be a strong nation. Never did their ambassadors come back from any other court with shaven beards.

VI

IN THE FRONT OF THE BATTLE

NE time, in the midst of the War of the Ambassadors' Beards, the Ammonites came boldly into the open fields before the gate of the city and attacked the besiegers. And Joab set his army in array against them. And in the foremost rank, in the front of the battle, he placed a stout soldier named Uriah the Hittite.

So they fell to fighting very furiously, and the Ammonites retreated, and the men of Israel pursued them even to the city gate. But on the top of the gate were archers, and they shot their arrows and drove their enemies back. The arrows flew into the faces of the Israelites like hail driven by the wind. In this encounter, Uriah the Hittite was killed.

Then Joab sent a messenger to Jerusalem to David, to tell him about the progress of the siege. Joab said to the messenger, "When the king hears how we were driven back with loss of life, he will be very angry. He will say, 'Why did you go so near the city? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who smote Abimelech,

the son of Jerubbaal? Did not a woman cast a piece of millstone upon him from the wall of Thebez so that he died? Why did you go so near the wall?' Then you are to look the king very steadily in the face and say, 'Thy servant, Uriah the Hittite, is dead also.'"

So the messenger came to the king, and told him the bad news of the battle; and David was quite as angry as Joab had expected.

"Why did you go so near the wall?" he cried. "You should have known that they would shoot upon you from the gate. You should have had more sense than to get within the range of the arrows of the archers. Go back now to Joab, and tell him from me —"

But here the messenger added a word more. Looking the king steadily in the face, he said, "And thy servant, Uriah the Hittite, is dead also."

Instantly, the king's manner changed. "Go now," he said, "and say to Joab, 'Let not this defeat distress you. The sword devours one as well as another. Make your attack stronger till you overcome the city.' Do not be discouraged.'"

For, the day before the battle, Uriah the Hittite had carried a letter from David to Joab. And in the letter, which Uriah could not read, the king said to the general, "Set the bearer of this letter in the forefront of the hottest

battle, and when you are attacked draw back and leave him, that he may be smitten and die." Joab had obeyed the order of the king, and Uriah had been slain in battle according to the king's command.

The reason for the killing of Uriah was this. Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, was very beautiful, and one day, while Uriah was in the land of Ammon fighting for King David, the king saw Bathsheba, and she pleased him much. He determined to add her to the number of his wives. But to do this, he must somehow get rid of her husband. Thus he sent Uriah to Joab with the fatal letter.

Now every day the king sat upon his throne of state to hear the petitions of his people, and to give the judgments of justice. And the prophet, Nathan, came, and said to David, "What shall be done in such a case as this? There were two men in one city, the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished up; and it grew up together with him and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd to set before the wayfaring man that was come

NATHAN REPROVES DAVID

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unto him; but he took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come unto him."

Then was David very angry, and he said to the prophet, "Nathan, the doer of this mean thing shall surely die."

And Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man!"

"Hear," said Nathan, "the word of the Lord God against you, David. Thus saith the Lord, 'I have made you king over Israel. I have enriched you with great riches. I have given you all manner of blessings, and have denied you nothing. And you have done this thing! You have done this shameful thing. You have broken my commandments. You have committed adultery and murder. You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife.'"

Then came David down from his high throne in shame and sorrow. "I have sinned against the Lord," he said.

VII

THE WISE WOMAN OF TEKOA

HEY were shearing sheep on the farm of Absalom, one of the sons of David. And there was to be a feast for the shearers; and Absalom had invited the king his father, and the princes his brothers. But David said, "No, my son, let us not all go; there are too many of us, we should be a burden to you." However, when Absalom urged him, he let the princes go, though he himself remained at home.

In the middle of the afternoon, as David was busy in the Castle of Zion, there came hurrying up along the road by which the princes went a frightened and excited messenger. "Tidings!" he cried. "Absalom has slain all of the king's sons, so that not one of them is left!" And the king arose in grief and horror, and all who stood by were amazed and fearful.

But one said, "Not so, my lord. If anybody is killed, it is your son Amnon only. Absalom and Amnon have long been bitter enemies, as you well know, O king. Now, there-

fore, let not my lord the king take this thing to heart, to think that all of the king's sons are dead; for Amnon only is dead."

And so it was. The watchman by the gate looked out, and behold there were many people coming in great confusion down the long hill on the Beth-horon road. And the watchman told the king. "I have seen people coming," he said, "hurrying along the Beth-horon road by the side of the hill."

And one said, "The king's sons are coming, as I told you."

Hardly had he ceased speaking when the king's sons appeared in sight, every man on his mule, hastening as if an enemy were in hot pursuit, and weeping as they came. Absalom was not among them, — nor Amnon. As for Absalom he was fleeing for his life to the wild plains across the Jordan, to the home of his mother's father, at Geshur.

So Absalom stayed at his grandfather's for three years, and did not dare to come home on account of his father's great displeasure. He was afraid that his father would have him put to death for the murder of his brother. He said, indeed, to himself, "I took my brother's life on account of a great wrong which he did. I was the servant of justice, and what I did was right." But he knew that his father did not

look at it that way. So the months passed, and the months passed, and Absalom had a great longing to go home. David, too, though he said not a word, had a great longing for Absalom, for he loved him more than all his sons. All this was known to Joab.

Then Joab called to him a Wise Woman of Tekoa, who knew a great deal about the world in which she lived, and had some knowledge, people said, of the world unseen and future. "Go to the king," said Joab to the Wise Woman, "and say to him as I bid you, thus and so."

So David sat on his high throne to hear the petitions of his people, and to give the judgments of justice, and there came to him a woman in deep mourning, crying, "Help, O king!"

The king said to her, "What is wrong with you, my daughter?"

She said, "My lord, my husband is dead, and I am left a widow. And I had two sons; and one day, when they were alone together in the field, they had a dispute and fell to fighting, and nobody was near to part them, and the one smote the other and slew him. And now, my lord, the whole family is risen up against me, crying, 'Deliver to us him that smote his brother, that we may punish him with death. We must have his life for the life of the brother whom he

killed.' But, O king, he is my only son; he is all that I have left!"

The king said to the woman, "Go home, and I will think about the matter, and see what I can do."

But the woman cried, "O king, I know that by the law my son should die; but break the law, and let the blame of the broken law be mine. The guilt be on me and on my father's house, and the king and his throne be innocent."

And the king said, "Nobody shall harm your son. I will command the avenger of blood not to touch a hair of his head."

But the woman continued kneeling before the king. "My lord, O king," she said, "my trouble is your trouble. You, O king, are the avenger of blood, and the son who has slain his brother is your own son Absalom. We must all die, and the dead cannot be restored to life, even as water which is spilt on the ground cannot be gathered up. But he who is banished may be brought back. Amnon is dead: nothing that you may do can help him. But Absalom lives. You are willing to pardon the son of your maidservant, pardon also your own son, the son of all your people."

And David said to the woman, "Answer me one question."

And the woman said, "Let my lord the king ask what he will."

Then David said, "Was it not Joab who sent you here? Was not his hand with you in all this?"

And the woman answered, "My lord the king is as wise as an angel of God. He knows all things that are in the earth. I cannot turn to the right hand or to the left from all that my lord the king has spoken. It was indeed Joab who put all these words in my mouth."

And the king said to Joab, "See now, I will do as you request. Go, therefore, and bring the young man Absalom back."

VIII

"I WILL BE KING!" SAYS ABSALOM

HEN Absalom came back, he found that he had lost his birthright. He was now the eldest son, after the death of Amnon; he was the crown prince. In the natural order, he should be king after his father. But he saw that David intended to make Solomon, the son of Bathsheba, his successor. Absalom determined to prevent it.

The first thing which Absalom did was to make as many friends as he could. These he found among his father's enemies. For some men hated David because, when they came with their unjust complaints, he decided against them. "O that I were judge in the land," said Absalom; "then you should have justice." And some hated David because they had been on the side of the house of Saul in the war for the crown, and in the defeat had lost their places and their lands. And some were reckless men who were glad of any change.

Then, when all was ready, Absalom sent out men with

trumpets, and they blew their trumpets and shouted, "Absalom is king!" And many foolish people shouted after them, "Absalom is king!" And presently the shouts were so loud, and the rebellion so strong, and the danger so great, and the loyalty of the court so uncertain, that David fled for his life. Away he went, out of the Castle of Zion, and over the Mount of Olives, and across the Jordan, into the wilderness.

Now, on the way between the mountain and the river, there lived a man named Shimei. He was of the family of Benjamin, and had sided with the house of Saul, and when the fighting for the crown had ended with the murder of Ishbosheth, he found himself disappointed and disgraced and poor. Indeed, he counted himself fortunate to have so much as his life left to him. Many of his friends had not fared even so well as that. So Shimei hated David, on account of these things, with a bitter hatred.

When the rebellion of the crown prince came to the ears of Shimei, he welcomed it with all his heart. When the trumpets sounded, and men cried "Absalom is king!" nobody shouted louder than Shimei. And now his old enemy, cast out and fleeing for his life, was on the road where he must pass by Shimei's house. And Shimei was waiting for him.

THE MAN WHO STONED THE KING

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So the king and his companions came in sight, weary and sad. The road lay along a valley, and Shimei stood on the side of the hill, with his hands full of stones. And he stoned David. And as he stoned the king, he cursed him. "O you scoundrel! O you bloody man!" he cried. "Begone, begone! The Lord has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, whose throne you stole, and in whose stead you reigned. The Lord has given the kingdom into the hands of Absalom. You are getting your deserts, O you man of blood!"

Abishai said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now, and take off his head."

But David said, "See, my own son seeks my life; how much more this man who has good cause to be my enemy. Let him curse on. Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction, and will change his curses into blessings."

So David and his men went on their way, and Shimei followed, cursing as he went, and throwing stones and dirt.

Now there were two young men in the Castle of Zion named Ahimaaz and Jonathan. They were the sons of the priests who were the friends of David. They waited in Jerusalem till they found out what Absalom intended to do, and when they knew they ran to tell the king. But a lad saw

them running and told Absalom, and he sent men to catch them. And Ahimaaz and Jonathan, finding that they were followed, came to the house of a man who had a well in his yard; and the man said, "Climb down into my well." And the man's wife spread a covering over the mouth of the well, and scattered corn upon it.

Then came the pursuers in hot haste, crying, "Where are the men who came this way?"

And the woman said, "They are gone over the brook of water." But all the water was in the woman's well! So the pursuers hurried on, and Ahimaaz and Jonathan climbed out, and went their way to David.

"Absalom," they said, "is waiting to gather his forces together. Then he is coming out to battle."

So David had time to assemble soldiers on his side. And when Absalom came, Joab and Abishai were in command of David's army, and went out to meet him.

Now, as the army went out to battle, David stood by the gate of Mahanaim and reviewed the troops. And he charged Joab and Abishai, saying, "Deal very gently, for my sake, with the young man Absalom." So they fell to fighting, and the men of Absalom were defeated; and Absalom fled with his men. And in his flight, he rode into a thick forest, and his mule ran under the low branches of a

thick oak, and Absalom was caught by his head in the oak, and the mule ran on and left him hanging.

Then came one and told Joab, "Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak."

And Joab cried, "You saw him? Why did you not smite him to the ground? I would have given you ten pieces of silver."

But the man replied, "Not for a thousand pieces of silver would I put out my hand against the king's son. I heard what the king said, 'Deal very gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.'"

Then Joab said, "I have no time to talk with you." And he rode away in haste, and came to Absalom, and thrust a spear into his heart.

Now David sat by the gate of Mahanaim, and a watchman was upon the top of the wall by the gate. And the watchman lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold a man came running along; and the watchman told the king. And the king said, "He brings good news."

So the first man came, and it was Ahimaaz. And Ahimaaz said, "All is well!" And he bowed before the king and said, "Blessed be the Lord God who has delivered up the men who lifted their hands against the king."

And David said, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

And Ahimaaz answered, "When I came away there was a great tumult, but I knew not what it was."

Then came the other runner, crying, "All is well!"

And David said, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

And the man answered, "May all the enemies of my lord the king be as that young man is."

Then the king was much moved, and he went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died instead of thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

IX

"I WILL BE KING!" SAYS ADONIJAH

O Absalom was buried under a heap of stones, and then the eldest living son of David was Adonijah. But still there stood the promise of David to Bathsheba that her son Solomon should sit upon his throne. And Adonijah felt about it just as Absalom had felt. "Why," he cried, "should my younger brother have the crown which belongs of right to me?"

Now, all his life, Adonijah had been given his own way. Never once had his father said to him, "Why have you done thus and so?" Never had his mother scolded him. And Adonijah determined to have his own way still. He made up his mind to take the crown, no matter what his father said.

So he began to live in state, like a crown prince. He had chariots and horsemen; and when he went to drive, fifty men in livery went with him. Joab was on his side, and so was Abiathar the priest.

Close by the walls of the Castle of Zion were two springs of water. One came out of the hill on the south, and was

called the Dragon's Well, En-Rogel; there was a rock beside it, called the Serpent's Rock. The other came out of the hill on the east and was called the Fountain, Gihon; there was a field beside it, called the Fuller's Field. The springs were not far apart, and were connected by a little river, called the Kidron, which ran from the one to the other along a valley. The water came up clear and cold out of the ground, and the springs were shaded by great trees, and were places of delight.

One day, Adonijah made a feast at the Dragon's Well. He had sheep and even oxen roasted whole, for he expected a large company, and he invited his brothers the princes, and the high officers of the court. But not all of them. He did not invite his father, the king, who was now too old and ill for feasts; neither did he ask Nathan the prophet, nor Benaiah the general, for they were not on his side; and he left out Solomon. So they sat down to eat and to drink; and Abiathar the priest sat on the right hand of Adonijah, and Joab the general sat on his left hand, for they were the guests of honor. And they were all very merry. In the midst of their merriment, one of them stood up and cried, "Long live King Adonijah!" And in an instant they were all upon their feet, shouting at the tops of their voices, "Long live King Adonijah! Long live King Adonijah!"

They made so much noise about it that news of the feast came to the ears of the prophet, Nathan, and he hastened to tell Bathsheba.

"Bathsheba," he cried, "have you heard what has happened? Adonijah has been made king, and David knows nothing of it! Come now, therefore, if you would save your life, and the life of Solomon your son. Go at once to David and say to him, 'My lord, O king, did not you promise me that Solomon my son should be king after you, and sit upon your throne? Why, then, has Adonijah been made king?' And while you are speaking with the king, I will come in and confirm what you say."

So Bathsheba went straight to the king.

Now David was old and weak and near the end of his life. And Bathsheba bowed down before him, and the king said, "What do you wish, Bathsheba?" And she said, "My lord, you swore to me by the Lord God, saying, 'Solomon your son shall be king after me, and shall sit upon my throne.' And now, see what has happened! Adonijah has been made king without your knowledge. Even at this moment, he sits at his coronation feast with Joab and Abiathar. Now, my lord, O king, the whole people wait for your decision. They wait for you to say who shall be king after you."

While she was yet speaking, in came the prophet, Nathan. And Nathan bowed low before the king.

"My lord, O king," said Nathan, "have you said 'Adonijah shall sit upon my throne'? For he has gone down this day to the Dragon's Well and called to him the princes and the captains, and there they sit eating and drinking, and crying, 'Long live King Adonijah!' He has not invited me, not Zadok the priest, nor Solomon. Is this your doing, my lord? Have you hidden this matter from us, and chosen Adonijah?"

Then David aroused himself from the weakness of his old age, and said to Bathsheba, "As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed me from all adversity, Solomon your son shall be king after me. He shall sit in my place on the throne. And this he shall do this very day."

And David commanded Nathan and Zadok, saying, "Take my servants with you, let Solomon my son ride on my own mule, bring him to the Fountain, and there let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet pour the sacred oil upon him and anoint him king over Israel. Then blow the trumpet, and cry, 'Long live King Solomon!'"

Now Adonijah and his guests had just come to the end of their merry dinner, when somebody said in the midst of all the noise, "What is that sound?"

LONG LIVE KING SOLOMON!

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And they were all still and listened, and the sound was heard again. Around the corner of the hill, from the spring of the Fountain, came the blare of a trumpet. Joab started up, and cried, "Who blows the trumpet, and what is the meaning of this sound of distant shouting?"

Then came Jonathan, the son of Abiathar, running. "Tidings!" he cried; "tidings, indeed! King David has made Solomon king. Solomon has ridden on the king's mule to the Fountain. Zadok and Nathan have there anointed him. He has already taken his seat upon the royal throne, and all the people acclaim him, shouting, 'Long live King Solomon!' "

Then all the guests of Adonijah were seized with terror, and every man rose up and fled, each to his own house. But Adonijah ran to the altar which stood before the Ark of God; for he thought, "Solomon will not kill me there." And Solomon said, "So long as Adonijah behaves himself, and is a worthy man, nobody shall hurt him." Then Adonijah came and fell down before the throne of his brother Solomon, the king. And the king said, "Go in peace."

And David died, and Solomon reigned in his stead.

X

THE BABY AND THE SWORD

NE night, King Solomon dreamed a dream, and in his dream he heard a voice out of the starry sky. And the voice said, "Solomon, what do you wish for most? Ask, and I will give it."

So the king had one wish: what should it be?

At last, the king said, "My best wish is to be wise. O Lord," he said, looking up into the heavens, "here am I a king in the place of my great father, David; and here is all this people over whom I am to rule; and I am but a child. Give thy servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may see the difference between right and wrong, and may know what to do."

The fact that he wished this wise wish showed that he was wise already.

Then the voice answered, "Solomon, this is pleasing to me, and I will do it. And I will do more also. You might have asked for gold and gems, and all the treasures of the mines. You might have asked for length of life. You might

have asked for continual victory in battle. But you have chosen wisdom. And in giving you wisdom I will give you these other things beside: riches, and long life, and victory. You shall be one of the greatest of all the kings that are upon the earth."

Then Solomon awoke, and behold it was a dream. But the dream came true.

One time, two women came and stood before the king, that he might decide between them. One said, "My lord, this woman and I lodge in the same house, and sleep in the same room. And we had each a little child, two babies, one of them only three days older than the other. And one night, while we were asleep, this woman overlaid her child, and the child could not breathe, and it died. And then what did she do? She waked and found that her child was dead, and she came over and laid her dead child by my side, and took my live child into her bed. And when I arose in the morning to nurse my child, behold the child in my arms was dead! But when the day grew light, and I could see, behold the baby was not mine, but hers."

And the other woman said, "No, but the living is my son, and the dead is your son."

And the first woman said, "No, but the dead is your son, and the living is my son."

Thus they contended before the king.

Then the king said, "This one says, 'The living is my son, and your son is dead,' and the other says, 'No, but your son is dead, and my son is the living.' Bring me a sword."

So they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other."

Then the woman to whom the child truly belonged cried to the king, — for her heart was full of fear and love for her child, — and she said, "O my lord, give her the living child and do not divide it; in no wise slay it!" But the other said, "Let it be neither hers nor mine; divide it."

Then the king answered and said, "Give the child to the one who would not have it put to death. She is the mother."

And all the people praised the wisdom of the king, for they saw that God had truly given him an understanding heart.

XI

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

NE time, King Solomon had a splendid visitor. From over the hills and far away, across the wide plains of Arabia, with a shining company of lords and ladies, and with camels laden with spices and gold and perfumes and precious stones, came the queen of Sheba.

And the queen said, "King Solomon, even in far-distant Sheba where I live, men speak of your wisdom and your glory, and I have come that I may see with my own eyes and hear with my own ears." And immediately she began to ask him questions.

Some of the questions were probably riddles, such as are written in the Book of Proverbs. "What four things are little upon the earth, but they are exceedingly wise? The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces."

Many of the answers were wise sayings about the best living of our life. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding: For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than pure gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared with her."

If the queen asked about the land over which the king reigned, Solomon could speak of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; and also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

Solomon answered all her questions. There was not anything hid from the king which he told her not.

Then said the queen of Sheba, "Now show me all the wonders of your court."

And Solomon showed her the Castle of Zion, the city which David had begun to build, and which Solomon himself had filled with strength and beauty.

He led her into the House of the Forest of Lebanon, which had so many cedar pillars that it looked like an enchanted wood; and along the walls hung the shields and bucklers of the king's bodyguard, all of pure gold.

He brought her into the Hall of Judgment, and showed

GIFTS FROM THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

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her his splendid throne of ivory, overlaid with gold; and the arms of the throne were golden lions, and on the six steps leading to the throne were twelve lions, two on each step.

Then they came to the King's palace, where Solomon lived, and his wife, the daughter of the king of Egypt. And all the walls were made of stone, and were cased within with carved work of cedar. And at the table, all the cups and plates were made of pure gold. And as they ate, they were waited on by servants in gorgeous liveries, while skilful harpers played sweet music on harps of red sandal-wood. And in the pantry and the storeroom and the kitchen were provisions for the king's court for one day: six hundred bushels of fine flour, and twice that quantity of meal; ten fat oxen from the stalls and twenty from the pastures; and a hundred sheep; beside harts and roebucks and fallow deer and fatted fowls. And outside, in the garden, among the trees and flowers, were apes and peacocks.

After that, King Solomon brought the queen of Sheba to the summit of the holy hill, and there was the splendid Temple. In front of the Temple, cut out of the rock of the hill, was the great altar where they offered the burnt sacrifice.

And the king said to the queen, "There is a strange story

about that rock. One time, in my father David's day, there was a deadly plague among the people. They were dying every day in every place, till the number of the dead was as much as seventy thousand. And my father had a vision. He saw an angel standing on this rock and stretching out his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it. And he heard the voice of the Lord saying to the angel, 'It is enough; stay now thine hand'; and that day the plague ceased. Now, the place was a threshing-floor, where a Jebusite named Araunah threshed his grain, a high place where the wind would blow away the chaff. And my father sent and bought it, and on the rock he built an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. There we bring our offerings, and there I built this Temple."

Beside the altar on the rock was a vast basin of brass which held so many gallons of water that they called it the Brazen Sea, and it rested on the backs of twelve brazen oxen. And to carry this water to the priests, to wash their hands, were ten great bowls of brass on wheels.

On either side of the entrance into the Temple were two tall brazen pillars, carved at the tops into shapes of lilies and pomegranates. The Temple itself was all of hewn stone. Between the pillars, and through a lofty porch, the king led the queen into a great room, floored with cypress, and hav-

ing its walls lined with cedar, and the cedar was carved with flowers and palms and gourds and winged angels. In this room was a golden table, on which were placed twelve loaves of bread. Beside the table was a seven-branched candlestick of gold.

And out of the great room opened a small room, through carved doors of olive-wood. This was the shrine, the Holy of Holies. Here were two carved figures of olive-wood, three times taller than a man, and their wings touched, tip to tip, and the outer tips touched the two side walls. Between these winged figures was the Ark of God, the sacred chest which Moses made, and which Joshua carried into battle, and which the Philistines captured from the sons of Eli and then sent back with five gold mice upon it, and which David brought at last into the Castle of Zion. Within the Ark lay the two tables of stone written over with the Ten Commandments.

Now when the queen of Sheba saw all the glory of Solomon, his stately buildings, his ivory throne, the gold of his table, the array of his courtiers, the dress of his servants all blue and purple and scarlet, and the Temple of the Lord, she said to the king, "It was a true report that I heard in my own land of all thy wisdom and thy majesty. But I could not believe it till I came and saw with my own eyes.

And behold, the half was not told me! Happy are they who minister in thy courts; happy are the people over whom thou rulest. Blessed be the Lord thy God who hath set thee on the throne of Israel."

XII

TEN TORN PIECES

HERE was a man named Jeroboam, a widow's son, who was an overseer of Solomon's workmen. The king had found that the young man was able and industrious, and had put him in charge of the great gangs of men who were building the palace and the new walls of the Castle of Zion. But the men had no pay, except the food which they ate. They had been brought down from their homes in the north, and forced to labor for the king. At the same time, other men were made to work in the forests and in the mines, felling trees and cutting stone for the king's buildings. And they were very discontented. And Jeroboam was discontented for their sake. He felt that Solomon was making the people slaves.

One day, as Jeroboam was walking in a field, the prophet Ahijah met him. Jeroboam was wearing a new coat. And as they talked, suddenly Ahijah seized the coat, pulled it off from Jeroboam's shoulders, and tore it into twelve pieces. Ten pieces he gave to Jeroboam, and said, "Thus

saith the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee.' " Then the overseer saw that the prophet had been reading the thoughts of his heart. For Jeroboam had been making up his mind to deliver the people from the oppression of the king.

"You shall be king," said Ahijah to Jeroboam. "You shall be king over Israel, in the place of Solomon, or in the place of Solomon's son."

But Solomon found out the plans which his overseer had against him, and Jeroboam fled for his life into the land of Egypt.

Now when the mighty reign of Solomon was over, and the king was dead, the crown came to his young son, Rehoboam. But Rehoboam could not wear the crown until the tribes should have given their consent. So there was a meeting of the people to consider what to do. And the people said to Rehoboam, "Your father made our yoke grievous. He put heavy burdens on our shoulders. We had to work long hours for poor pay. He treated us like slaves. Let us hear now what you propose to do. Make our yoke lighter, and we will serve you."

And Rehoboam said, "Come back in three days' time, and I will answer you."

YOU SHALL BE KING OVER ISRAEL

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TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.

So Rehoboam consulted with the old men who had lived in the court of his father. "What answer," he said, "shall I give to the demands of the people?"

And the old men, who had seen the tyranny of Solomon, said to Rehoboam, "If you will serve the people, and give them a good answer, they will be your faithful servants forever."

But the answer of the old men did not please young Rehoboam, and he consulted the young men, his own companions. "What do you advise?" he said.

And the young men said, "This is the right reply to make to the demands of the people. Say to them, 'My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. My father put upon you a heavy yoke, but I will make it heavier. He chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges.'"

So the three days came to an end, and the tribes went to hear Rehoboam's answer. And he answered them as the young men advised. "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will make it heavier still. He chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges."

Then no voice cried, "Long live King Rehoboam!" Instead of that, the men rose up against the king. They defied him to his face. He had thought to deal with them as

masters deal with slaves. But they showed him that they were free men. They shouted one to another, with great voices, "To your tents, O Israel! Now see to thine own house, David!" And the men who shouted were ten tribes. Only Judah and Benjamin, the people of the south, who lived in Jerusalem and thereabout, remained with Rehoboam. When one of Rehoboam's officers addressed the people, trying to call them back, they stoned him so that he died. And Rehoboam got into his chariot and fled to Jerusalem to save his life.

Then came Jeroboam back from Egypt, and they made him king of Israel.

XIII

THE PROPHET AND THE LION

O the people were divided into two kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north.

Now in the northern kingdom there were two holy places. One was Dan, at the sources of the Jordan, the other was Bethel, only four hours' journey from Jerusalem. It was at Bethel that Jacob had seen the vision of the ladder, on which the angels were coming down from heaven and going up again. "Surely God is in this place," said Jacob; and he made an altar there. These holy places, Jeroboam adorned with golden images: calves, such as Aaron had made in the wilderness, or bulls, such as Solomon had made to glorify the Temple. And he ordained priests to wait upon the altars.

One day, there came to Bethel from Judah a man of God, a young prophet. The young prophet felt that Jeroboam had done evil in dividing the people. He hated the altars which the King of Israel had made. And he came out of Judah to Bethel to say so. Boldly he stood in the presence of the king and of his court, and declared the message

which he believed God had given him. "O altar! altar!" he cried; "men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." And when the king put forth his hand to lay hold upon the prophet, suddenly his hand was withered, till the man of God besought the Lord, and it was restored to him again, and became as it was before.

Then the king, liking the young prophet's boldness, asked him to dine with him. "Come home with me," he said, "and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward."

But the man refused. "If you were to give me the half of all your house, I would not go in with you; neither will I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For the Lord who sent me said to me, 'Eat no bread, nor drink water; go in one way to Bethel, and come out another.'"

So the prophet, having done his errand, departed into his own land another way.

But there lived in Bethel an old prophet, and when his sons came home that day, they told him what had happened at the altar. "A young man came," they said, "and cursed the altar which you have blessed." And the old man was troubled, for in so doing the young prophet had condemned him. It was as if the man from Judah had said, "Here you live, you old prophet, and let these wrong things go on.

You ought to be ashamed." The old prophet hardly knew whether to be ashamed or angry.

"Which way did the man go?" he said. And when they told him, straight he saddled his ass, and rode off down the road to overtake him.

He found him sitting under an oak. "Are you the man of God," he asked, "who came from Judah?"

"I am," he answered.

"Come home, then, with me and eat bread."

But he replied, "I may not return with you, nor go in with you; neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. For it was said to me by the word of the Lord, 'Thou shalt eat no bread, nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou camest.'"

Then the old man put the young man to a test. "I will see," he said to himself, "whether he is a faithful prophet or not. He has withstood one temptation, he would not dine with the king. Now I will try him with another." And he said, "Young man, I am a prophet as well as you; and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, even as to you, and the angel said, 'Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'" But he lied to him.

And the young prophet believed him. He ought to have

said, "God spoke to me; and until He speaks again and changes His command, I will do what He said. No matter what He spoke to you. That is not my business. I must do my own errand, and follow my own revelation of God's will." But he believed the old prophet. He went back with him, and did eat bread in his house, and drank water.

And it came to pass, as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came of a truth to the prophet who brought him back. And he cried unto the man of God who came from Judah, saying "You have cursed the altar which I blessed; you have said to the people that I am no true prophet, else I would have cursed it long ago. But you are no true prophet, either. Thus saith the Lord " — and the old man rose from the table, and lifted his hands on high — "Forasmuch as you have disobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and have not kept the commandment which the Lord your God commanded you, but came back, and have eaten bread and drunk water in this place, of the which the Lord did say to you, 'Eat no bread, and drink no water,' surely evil shall befall you. You should have done what you knew to be right, and should have refused to do what you knew to be wrong, no matter what anybody said."

Then the young man started to go home. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way and slew him, and his

body was cast in the way, and the ass on which he rode stood on one side, and the lion on the other.

And men passed by and saw the body cast in the way, and the ass and the lion standing beside it, and they came and told of it in Bethel, and the old prophet heard it. And the old prophet said, "It is the man of God who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord." And he said to his sons, "Saddle me the ass."

And he went and found as it was told, the body cast in the way, and the ass and the lion standing beside it. And the prophet took up the body of the man of God, and brought it back to Bethel. And he laid him in his own grave, in the tomb which he had hewn out of the rock. And he mourned for him, crying, "Alas! my brother." And he said to his sons, "When I am dead, bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. For the word which he spoke against the altars of this land is true."

XIV

THE SPARING OF BENHADAD

S the soldiers of Israel came back from a victorious battle with the Syrians, a prophet met them. And the prophet said to the first man he met, "Strike me in the face!"

But the man would not do it. "Not I!" he said. "Why should I strike you?"

The prophet said, "May the lions eat you!"

The next man did as the prophet asked. He struck him so that the blood flowed. Then the prophet bound up his bloody head, and waited for the king.

And Ahab the king came by. And the prophet cried and said, "O king, help me! I was in the midst of the battle, and suddenly a soldier turned aside and brought a prisoner to me. 'Watch this man,' he said, 'and if by any chance he shall be missing, then I will have your life for his life!' And, O king, as I was busy here and there, the prisoner was gone!"

The king said, "You have decided your own case. You let the man escape; you must pay the penalty."

Then the prophet took the covering from about his head,

and the king saw who he was. And the prophet said, "Thus said the Lord to you, O king, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had condemned to death, your life shall be for his life, and your people shall be for his people.'"

And Ahab, king of Israel, went home disturbed and angry.

Now what had happened was this. There had been a long war between Ahab, king of Israel, and Benhadad, king of Syria. Benhadad began it, because he was the stronger. He sent messengers to Ahab, saying, " The gold and silver of your city belong to me. Come, send all you have. And when you send the money, send along your wives and children also!"

And Ahab consented, because he did not see how he could help it.

Then Benhadad said, "While we are taking the gold and silver, and the wives and children, we will see if there is anything else which we want. Give us the keys of all your houses, and we will search them. Whatever we find that is attractive, we will carry it away!"

But the king felt that this was more than he could bear, and the people agreed with him. They would die first, they said. So Ahab sent back Benhadad's messengers saying, " This I cannot do." And to Benhadad's threats he said,

"Let not him that girdeth on his armor boast himself as he that putteth it off."

Then Benhadad of Syria came out to battle, with thirty-two kings to help him. And he was in his tent with his companions drinking themselves drunk — so sure were they of victory — when one came and said, "The Israelites are coming!"

Benhadad said, "Very well, take them alive. If they come in peace, take them alive. Or if they come in war, take them alive."

But the Israelites fell upon the Syrians so fiercely that they fled in defeat and terror from the field, and Benhadad fled with them.

The next year the Syrians came back. They had now an army greater than before. They had dismissed the inefficient kings, and had put captains in their places. They said, "The Israelites defeated us last year because we fought among the hills, for their gods are hill gods. Now we will fight them in the plain."

And their army filled the country. The Israelites encamped before them like two little flocks of goats. On the seventh day, they joined in battle; and again the Syrians fled, and Benhadad with them; and they took refuge in a city and the Israelites pursued them and besieged them.

Then the servants of Benhadad said to him in his distress, "We have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings. Let us clothe ourselves in sackcloth, and put ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel, and implore him to spare your life."

And this they did. They girded sackcloth about them, and put ropes upon their heads, and came to the king of Israel, and said, "Thy servant Benhadad says, 'I pray thee, let me live.'"

And Ahab answered, "Is he yet alive? He is my brother."

"Yes, indeed," cried the Syrians, catching up his words, "he is your brother."

And Ahab said, "Go bring him."

So they brought Benhadad, and Ahab took him into his own chariot. And there they made an agreement, the two kings together. Benhadad said, "The cities which my father took from your father, I will restore; and you may have a street and market in my capital city of Damascus, as my father had a street and market in your capital city of Samaria." To this Ahab consented.

Thus he spared the king of Syria's life, and brought upon himself the reproof of the prophet.

The prophet would have had Ahab kill Benhadad, as Samuel, in the old time, had hewed King Agag in pieces.

His idea was that between the people of the Lord and their neighbors there should be no peace nor truce. But Ahab desired to make his kingdom strong. He had already strengthened it toward the west by marrying Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon. Now he strengthened it toward the east by sparing Benhadad, king of Damascus.

XV

A HANDFUL OF MEAL

THERE was a mighty famine in the land, and all the people were in want. Day after day, and even month after month, the sun had come up shining in the morning and had gone down shining in the evening, till the people hated the sight of it. When spring came, they could not plant, for all the fields were dry as dust. And when the fall came, there were no crops to reap.

Even the king went out to look for water. He called the governor to his palace. "Let us go," he said, "into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks. It may be that we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts." And out they started, the governor in one direction, and the king in the other, to see if in all the country there remained one flowing stream, or one green field.

Now near Sidon, where Ahab had married Jezebel, there was a town called Zarephath, and in it dwelt a poor widow with her only son. And one day, when the famine was at its

height, and the cupboard was almost bare, and nothing was left in the house but a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse, the widow went out to the gate of the town to gather wood.

"I will get some sticks," she said to herself, "and make a fire, and my son and I will have one more supper before we die of hunger."

So she stooped to gather the wood into her apron, and stood up again, and there was a man coming out of the country, a strange-looking man. His hair and beard were long, and for a coat he had the yellow, hairy skin of a camel, and a long staff in his hand.

The man said, "Bring me, I pray you, a little water in a cup, that I may drink." For he had come a long and thirsty journey. And as she was going to fetch it, he said, "And bring me also, I pray you, a bit of bread."

Then said the woman, "I and my son are dying in this famine. All that I have is a handful of meal in a barrel and a little olive oil in a cruse; and here I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and make bread for the last time for my little son and me."

But the man said, "I am a man of God. My name is Elijah. I have been living away across the country, beyond the Jordan, in the wilderness of Gilead, beside a brook.

There the Lord has taken care of me. Even the ravens fed me, bringing bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening; and I drank of the brook. And when the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land, the Lord sent me here to you. Come, now, let us trust in the Lord together. Make bread for me and for you and your son, for thus saith the Lord, ' The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day when the Lord shall send the rain.'"

And the woman did as Elijah said. And he and she and her son had food to eat. And the barrel of meal did not waste, neither did the cruse of oil fail, until the rain came.

XVI

THE FIRE AND THE RAIN

HEN Jezebel came from Sidon to be the wife of Ahab, and queen of Israel, she brought her religion with her. The people of Sidon, like most of those whom the Israelites found in Palestine, worshipped God under the name of Baal; but the Israelites worshipped him under the name of Jehovah. One difference between the two religions was that the Israelites believed in one Jehovah, one Lord God over all the earth, while Jezebel and her people believed in many Baals, dwelling in all the high mountains, and beside the springs of water, and in the fertile fields. Another difference was that the Israelites believed that Jehovah cared much about their conduct, and was the God of the Ten Commandments, while Jezebel believed that Baal was satisfied with the offering of sacrifice, and did not care whether men did right or wrong; indeed, some things, which in the religion of Jehovah were held to be very wrong, were encouraged in the religion of Baal. Thus the differences were of great importance.

Jezebel brought her religion with her. Her father had been a priest, until one day he murdered the king of Sidon and took his place. She brought priests of Baal more and more, till there were hundreds of them; and they ate at the queen's table. The prophets of Jehovah she disliked and persecuted till they had to hide from her hatred in the woods and in the caves.

Thus there was a strife between the two religions, and it seemed as if the religion of Baal would drive the religion of Jehovah out. Some people said that that was why the famine came. "Elijah," they said, "has prayed to Jehovah, and He has stopped the rain."

At last, the people were summoned to meet in a great assembly at Mount Carmel to decide this matter. Which of the two religions shall be the religion of the land? Ahab called all Israel.

On one side were the priests of Baal, under the protection of the court. On the other side was Elijah. As for the prophets of Jehovah, they did not dare to show their heads for fear the queen would kill them. Thus there were four hundred and fifty men on one side, and one man on the other. But the one man was not afraid. In the face of the king and queen and all the priests, he declared that the religion of Baal was false, and that the only true God was Jehovah.

Elijah cried to the great assembly of Israel, "How long will you halt between two opinions? If Jehovah is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, then follow him."

But the people answered him not a word.

Then said Elijah, "I, even I only, remain a prophet of Jehovah; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Come, now, let us take two bullocks; and let them take one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood on their altar, and put no fire under. And I will take the other bullock and prepare it for my sacrifice, and lay it on my altar on the wood, and put no fire under. Let them call on the name of Baal and I will call on the name of Jehovah; and the God who answers by fire, let Him be God."

And all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."

So the priests of Baal took a bullock, and cut it in pieces, and laid the sacrifice upon the altar on the wood, and put no fire under; and they called upon their God. From morning until noon they called, crying, "O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice, nor any that answered.

When it was noon, and the priests still cried and the people waited, and nothing happened, Elijah mocked them. "Cry louder," he said; "Baal is busy; either he is talking, or

he is hunting, or he has gone upon a journey; or else he is asleep and must be awaked."

And they cried louder and louder, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lances till the blood gushed out upon them. And the hours passed until the sun began to set, and still there was no voice nor answer, nor was any heed given to their prayers.

Then said Elijah to the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him.

There had been an altar of Jehovah in that place, but it was broken down. Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of Israel, and built it up again. He made a trench around the altar, and prepared his bullock, and laid the sacrifice upon the altar on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the sacrifice, and on the wood." And he said, "Do it the second time"; and they did it the second time. And he said, "Do it the third time"; and they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar till the trench was full.

Then Elijah lifted up his hands to heaven and prayed, "O Lord God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy command. Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that this

people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again."

Then the fire of the Lord fell. There was a flash as of lightning out of the clear sky. The bullock and all the wood were burned, even the stones of the altar were consumed; and the fire licked up the water that was in the trench.

When the people saw it, they fell upon their faces; and they cried, "Jehovah He is the God! Jehovah He is the God!"

And Elijah called to them to seize the priests of Baal. "Let not one of them escape." And they laid hold on them, and carried them down the side of the mountain to the bottom of the valley. And the priests of Baal did not come back again.

And Elijah said to Ahab, "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain."

So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel, and sat upon the ground, having his face between his knees. And he said to his servant, "Go up now, and look toward the sea." And his servant went up, and came back presently saying, "There is nothing." The hot sky was without a cloud, as it had been for months, and the sea lay beneath it like a mirror.

And Elijah said, "Go again, and look; and still again," till

he had gone seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time that the servant said, "Behold, there rises out of the sea a little cloud, like a man's hand." And Elijah said, "Go, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and get you down from the mountain, before the rain stops you.'"

And in the mean while, the heavens grew black with clouds, and the winds blew, and the waves roared in the sea, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode in his chariot, in all haste, before the rain, and Elijah ran before him.

XVII

THE STILL, SMALL VOICE

OWN ran Elijah before Ahab's chariot across the plain to Jezreel. And the rain came behind. But in the palace was the queen, and when the king told her what had happened, and how the prophets of Baal had been defeated and destroyed, she was angry exceedingly. As for the fire from heaven, that, she said, was only an accidental stroke of lightning; and as for the rain, it would have rained anyhow. Jezebel believed in Baal still, and declared that the fire and the rain proved nothing.

So the queen sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "You have slain my prophets with the sword. Now let the gods do so to me and more also if I make not your life as the life of one of them, by to-morrow about this time."

When he heard that, he arose and fled for his life. He had defied the king and mocked the priests of Baal; he had commanded the lightning and the rain; but he was afraid of the queen. Suddenly in the midst of his success, his courage failed him. He saw, too, that the people, though they had

shouted, "Jehovah is the God! Jehovah is the God!" were not much in earnest about it. They explained the fire and the rain as the queen did. It was no miracle, they said. It was no argument. It just happened so.

Thus the prophet who had stood up on the Lord's side saw that he still stood alone. His victory was turned into defeat. Away he went, out of the reach of Jezebel, and made his way toward that great mountain in Arabia where the Lord Jehovah had spoken face to face with Moses. "I will go," he said, "and find God." For in this sudden turn of fortune, it seemed to him that God was far away.

On his journey he came to Beersheba, far in the south, where Abraham and Isaac and Jacob had lived, in the old time. And out of Beersheba he went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree. And he requested for himself that he might die. "It is enough," he said; "now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

And under the juniper tree, he lay down and slept.

And in his sleep an angel touched him, and the angel said, "Arise and eat." And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.

And again a second time this happened. He slept, and an

angel touched him, and the angel said, "Arise and eat, or else the journey will be too long for you." And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of the food forty days and forty nights to the mount of God, which was called Horeb and Sinai.

And he found a cave, and lodged there. And behold, the word of the Lord Jehovah came to him, and the Lord said, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

And Elijah said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, and thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

And the Lord said, "Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord."

And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire.

And after the fire, a still, small voice.

When Elijah heard in his soul the still, small voice, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood at

the entrance of the cave. And the voice said, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

And Elijah said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, and thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

And the Lord said, "Elijah, you are not alone in Israel. There are seven thousand men in your country who have not bowed their knees to Baal, and have not kissed his images with their mouths. Go back now; take up your work again. This shall you do, and that shall you do, and shall win great victories yet for my name's sake. Be strong and of a good courage."

And Elijah went back into the land of Israel, and stood again against Baal, and against the queen.

XVIII

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

OW in the city of Jezreel, which was King Ahab's northern capital, there was a vineyard close beside the palace. And Ahab said to Naboth, the owner of the vineyard, "Give me your vineyard that I may have it for a garden of vegetables, because it is near my house. I will either give you a better vineyard for it, or I will pay you what it is worth in money."

But Naboth said to Ahab, "This was my father's vineyard, and my grandfather had it before him. It is my inheritance. I will not sell it."

So the king went back into his palace, heavy and displeased, and laid him down upon his bed, and turned his face to the wall. And when it came time for dinner, and they sent to call him, there he was, and he would not come down. He would eat nothing. So the queen came to see what was the matter.

"Why are you so sad?" said Jezebel. "What has happened that you lie here on your bed, and will not come to dinner?"

And Ahab said, "You know the vineyard next to the palace, where we had planned to make a garden of vegetables. I spoke to Naboth about it, and he will not sell it. I said, 'I will give you a better vineyard, or I will pay you in money'; and he said, 'It is my vineyard, I will keep it.'"

Then said Jezebel to Ahab, "Are you not the king of Israel? Come, now, arise and eat, and let your heart be merry. I will give you Naboth's vineyard."

So Jezebel wrote letters in Ahab's name, and signed them with the royal seal, and sent them to the elders and the nobles who lived in Jezreel and were Naboth's neighbors. And in the letters she said, "Proclaim a fast, and set up Naboth on a high place among the people, and hire two men to bear witness against him, saying, 'Naboth has cursed God and the king.' Then carry him out, and stone him to death."

And the elders and the nobles of the city, Naboth's neighbors, did as Jezebel commanded. They proclaimed a fast, and set up Naboth on a high place among the people; and in came two false witnesses, and witnessed against him, saying, "Naboth did curse God and the king." Then they carried him out of the city, and stoned him with stones till he died.

Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth is stoned, and is dead."

And when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned and was dead, she said to Ahab, "Arise, now, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but is dead." And Ahab rose up, to go down to Naboth's vineyard to take possession of it.

But he had forgotten Elijah.

Immediately, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, saying, "Arise, go down to meet Ahab. Behold he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he has gone down to possess it. And say to him,' Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?' and say also, ' Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood.'"

So Ahab stood in the midst of Naboth's vineyard, and planned his garden of vegetables. "Here," he said, "I will plant this, and there I will plant that. Here shall be a hedge, and there a wall." And he looked up, and behold, Elijah came!

Elijah came looking as he looked that day on Carmel when he called down fire out of the sky. His hair and beard were long and wild, and he had the yellow skin of a camel girded about him, and in his hand he clenched his staff.

And Ahab said, "Have you found me, O my enemy?"

And Elijah answered, "I have found you, Ahab. You have sold yourself to work evil in the sight of God. And on you shall evil come. Thus saith the Lord, 'For the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin, I will destroy thy house. As dogs licked the blood of Naboth, so shall dogs lick thy blood, and dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.'"

Thus did Elijah speak to King Ahab as Nathan, before him, spoke to King David. And Ahab, like David, repented of his sin. He rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon him, and fasted.

XIX

THE CHARIOT OF FIRE

THE time had come for the end of the ministry of Elijah. He had already appointed his successor. For on the day when he came back from Mount Sinai, having heard the still, small voice, he passed a man who was ploughing in a field. The man was named Elisha. He was ploughing in his father's field, having twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah, as he passed, took off his mantle and cast it over the shoulders of Elisha. Immediately, Elisha stopped his ploughing. He left the oxen. He ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and I will follow thee." But Elijah said, "Go back again. What have I done to thee?" Elisha knew, however, that he had been called to be the companion of Elijah.

And now Elijah was starting again upon a journey. As he had gone before to Mount Sinai to meet God as Moses had met Him there, so now he was going to Mount Nebo, to whose heights Moses had at last gone up, and had never

come down again. Elijah knew that the end of his life was near at hand. He desired to die amidst the wild and lofty hills where the Lord had buried Moses.

But he urged Elisha not to go with him. He wished to spare him the last pain of parting. So he said to him at Gilgal, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they went down to Bethel.

And there was a company of prophets at Bethel, to whom Elijah wished to say a last word before he went. And they said to Elisha, "Do you know that this day the Lord will take away your master?" He said, "Yes, I know it. Do not speak of it; I cannot bear to hear it."

And Elijah said, "Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho." But Elisha said, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they came to Jericho.

And at Jericho also there was a company of prophets. And they said to Elisha, "Do you know that this day the Lord will take away your master?" He said, "Yes, I know it. Do not speak of it to me."

Then Elijah said, "Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan." But Elisha said again, "As

the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they two went on.

And as they went, fifty of the prophets followed them, and stood by the river on the high bank, to see what would happen. And they said that they saw Elijah take off his mantle and wrap it together and smite the water. "And the water," they said, "was divided hither and hither, and the two went over on dry ground."

So they went over the river Jordan, and came to the mountains of Moab. And Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee."

And Elisha said, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

And Elijah answered, "You have asked a hard thing. The spirit of a prophet cannot be given to a prophet, like a mantle. But see now what you will do when the storm comes, and the skies are open, and I am taken away. If you look on unafraid and see me when I am taken up, then shall you be my successor, indeed, and have a double portion of my spirit. But if you are afraid, and shut your eyes in terror, then you are not the man to carry on my work."

And as they still went on and talked, behold, the sky grew black above them, and the wind began to blow as it blew that day on Sinai, and the thunder rolled among the hills,

and the lightnings flashed, and in the midst of the storm, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

And Elisha saw it. He looked on unafraid. And he cried, "My father! My father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" And Elijah was seen no more; only his mantle had fallen from his shoulder. And Elisha took it up.

So Elisha returned to Jericho alone. And the fifty prophets were still waiting on the bank and watching; and they said that they saw Elisha take Elijah's mantle, and wrap it together and smite the river. "And the water," they said, "was divided hither and hither, and over he came on dry land."

But for all that, they did not believe what Elisha told them.

Elisha said, "My master has been taken from my side this day. We stood upon the mountain in the tempest, and behold a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and they carried him to heaven."

"Oh, no!" said the prophets. "You lost him in the storm. What you saw was only a great flash of lightning. You imagined the horses and the chariot. Come, now,

let us send men to find him. He is wandering upon some mountain, or in some valley."

Elisha said, "You shall not send."

But they urged him till he was ashamed. They said, "You don't wish to have Elijah found. You wish to be the prophet in his place."

At last he said, "Send them if you will."

And they sent men to search the land. And for three days they looked high and they looked low; they called Elijah's name in all the woods and caves. But they did not find Elijah.

"Did I not tell you?" said Elisha.

XX

THE PROPHET AND THE PROPHETS

NE time there was a prophet who stood alone, like Elijah, against four hundred prophets. But these four hundred were prophets of the Lord. The trouble with them was that they were mistaken.

It happened in this way.

Benhadad, king of Syria, had broken the promise which he made to Ahab. He had promised to restore to Israel the cities which his father had taken away. But he kept one of them. The city of Ramoth in Gilead he still held in his own possession. So Ahab decided to march his soldiers out, and take it. He gathered his army together at Samaria, his southern capital, and they all expected to be victorious; and so much the more because the king of Judah had come with his soldiers to fight on their side against the Syrians.

But the king of Judah said, "Before we go to battle, let us ask the Lord what we ought to do. Let us hear what the prophets have to say."

So the king of Israel gathered the prophets together,

about four hundred men, and said, "Shall I go up against Ramoth-Gilead, or not?"

And they all said, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hands of the king."

But the king of Judah was not satisfied. It seemed to him that the prophets, instead of trying to find out what the will of the Lord was, were trying only to please the king. So he said, "Is there no other prophet of the Lord, that we might inquire of him?"

And the king of Israel said to the king of Judah, "There is one other man by whom we might inquire of the Lord, but I hate him. He never prophesies good for me, but always evil. On the day when I made the treaty of peace with the king of Syria and spared his life, this man rebuked me to my face. He stopped me as I came from battle, and his head was bound up and bleeding as if he had been wounded, and I did not know him. And he told me a made-up story about losing a captive who had been entrusted to his charge; and I told him that he ought to lose his own life to pay for his neglect. And the man took off his bandages and there was the prophet, Micaiah, and he said, 'You, O king, have lost the captive, because you spared Benhadad; now shall your life be for his life.' He is my enemy."

And the king of Judah said, "Let not the king say so."

And the king of Israel called an officer and said to him, "Bring here Micaiah the prophet quickly."

So the two kings sat by the gate of Samaria, each on his throne, wearing their royal robes, and all the prophets were assembled before them prophesying. Some cried this, and some cried that; but all agreed that the kings would gain the victory. One of them had made him horns of iron, and he went back and forth before the kings holding out the horns and saying, "Thus saith the Lord, with these horns shall you push the Syrians till you have destroyed them." "Go up! Go up to Ramoth!" cried the prophets, "for the Lord shall deliver the city into the king's hand."

Meanwhile, the officer was gone to fetch Micaiah. "Come, now," said the friendly officer, "all the prophets with one consent are promising good fortune; speak as they do, promise success."

But Micaiah said, "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak."

So Micaiah came to the king.

And the king of Israel said, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-Gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?"

Micaiah looked about at the four hundred prophets and smiled scornfully. "Oh, yes," he said, "you hear what these men say. Go on, and prosper. The Lord will give you Ra-

moth-Gilead, and whatever else you may desire." But it was plain that Micaiah did not mean it.

And the king said, "How many times shall I adjure you to tell me nothing but the truth? What does the Lord say?"

And Micaiah answered, "I had a vision. I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have no shepherd. And I heard the Lord say, 'These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace.'"

Then the king of Israel said to the king of Judah, "Did I not tell you that he would prophesy no good, but only evil?"

And Micaiah answered, "I had another vision. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left. And the Lord said, 'Who shall persuade Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?' And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, 'I will persuade him.' And the Lord said to him, 'How will you do it?' And he said, 'I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the Lord said, 'You shall persuade him; go forth and do so.' Now, therefore, O king, these prophets have deceived you; they have spoken lies. You shall be defeated at Ramoth-Gilead, and shall die in battle."

Then the man who had the horns came up, and struck Micaiah in the face, and said, "Which way went the spirit of the Lord from me to speak to you?"

And Micaiah said, "Indeed, you shall see in the day when you flee from one room to another to hide yourself."

But the king of Israel paid no heed to the warning of Micaiah. He was very angry. "Take Micaiah," he said, "and carry him back to the governor of the city, and say, 'Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with the bread of affliction, and with the water of affliction, till I return in peace.'"

And Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, I am indeed mistaken."

So the king of Israel and the king of Judah went up to battle. And the king of Israel said to the king of Judah, "You wear your robes of state, but I will disguise myself." So the fight began.

And the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains, saying, "Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel." And they attacked the king of Judah, for he was dressed in royal robes. But the king of Judah turned and fled, crying, "I am the king of Judah!" So they left off pursuing him.

And a certain man drew a bow at a venture and smote the

king of Israel between the joints of his armor, and he was wounded to the death. And he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn about, and carry me out of the army. I am wounded grievously." And the battle increased, and the king was held up in his chariot against the Syrians, and as the sun was going down he died. And the blood ran out of his wound into the chariot. And toward sunset, a cry went through the army, "Every man to his own city! Every man to his own country!"

So the day was lost. And the dead king was carried to Samaria. And they washed the chariot and the armor, and the dogs licked his blood, as the Lord had said by the mouth of Elijah.

XXI

"MY HEAD! MY HEAD!"

NE day, Elisha, being on a journey, came to a place called Shunem, and as he passed a woman's house, she asked him to come in, and he came in and dined with the woman and her husband. And the house became to him a home. Whenever he passed that way, he stopped there.

And the woman said to her husband, "You see how this holy man of God goes back and forth upon his journeys by our house; let us make him a little room, and let us set there for him a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick, and it shall be his room; it shall be the prophet's chamber. Whenever he comes by, he shall turn in thither."

So Elisha, as he passed, turned into this pleasant room, and lodged there.

One time, Elisha said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunamite woman who is so hospitable to us. Tell her I would like to speak with her."

And the woman came and stood before him.

And Elisha said, "You have been careful for us with all this care: what can I do for you? Can I speak for you to the king, or to the commander of the army?"

But the woman said, "I am content. I have abundance, and I dwell at peace among my own people." So she went out.

And the prophet said to his servant, "Surely, there is something I can do. There is some way in which I can show her kindness for all her thoughtfulness of me."

And Gehazi said to Elisha, "There is one thing which she desires. She has no child."

And he said, "Call her."

And when he had called her, she stood in the door of the room.

And Elisha said, "Next year about this time, you shall have a son."

And the woman thought that it was too good to be true. "No, my lord," she cried, "O man of God, do not raise false hopes in the heart of your handmaid."

But so it was. The next year, according to the prophet's word, God sent her a little son.

But when the lad was grown so big and strong that he could help his father in the field, he went out one hot day among the reapers. And as he worked, he fell sick; and he cried to his father, "My head! My head!" and his father

said, "Carry him to his mother." And they carried him to his mother, and he sat on her lap until noon, and then died. And she carried him up into the prophet's chamber, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door and went out.

And she called to her husband, and said, "Send me one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may find the man of God." And she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, "Drive on now fast, and do not stop until I tell you."

And so she came to the man of God on Mount Carmel.

And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said, "Gehazi, yonder comes our friend, the good woman of Shunem. Run now, and meet her, and say, 'Is anything the matter? Is your husband well? Is your child well?'"

She said to Gehazi, "All is well."

But when she came to Elisha, she fell down before him and caught him by the feet. And when Gehazi would have sent her away, Elisha said, "Let her alone, for her soul is grieved within her; and the Lord has hidden her trouble from me, and I know it not."

And the woman said with tears, "My lord, did I not desire a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?"

Then Elisha perceived what sorrow had befallen the woman, and he said to Gehazi, "Here is my staff, take it and go quickly. If you meet any one, do not speak to him; and if he speaks, do not answer. Make no delay. Lay my staff on the face of the child."

So the servant went and laid the prophet's staff on the face of the child. But the lad did not stir. There was neither voice nor hearing. And he returned, and told his master. "The child," he said, "is not awaked."

Then Elisha came himself, and there lay the child, as one dead, upon his bed. And he went in, and shut the door behind him. They were alone, the prophet and the child. And Elisha prayed for the child's life. And he lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon the child's mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes and his hands upon his hands. And as he lay upon him, the flesh of the lad grew warm.

And Elisha went out, and waited, walking to and fro, and then again he lay upon the child. And the child sneezed seven times, and opened his eyes.

And Elisha said to Gehazi, "Call the mother." And when she came, he said, "Take up your son." And she bowed herself to the ground, and thanked God and the prophet. And she took her son into her arms.

Now it happened after this that there was a famine in

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the land, and the woman and her son went into the country of the Philistines, and while they were gone somebody took possession of their house and land. And one day, the king was talking with Gehazi about Elisha, and Gehazi was telling the king about the recovery of the lad of Shunem. And at that moment, who should appear at the king's door but the woman and her son! They had come to ask the king to restore to them their land and house. And Gehazi said, "My lord, O king, there is the woman now, and her son with her." So the king commanded, saying, "Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now."

9170

XXII

THE CAPTAIN AND THE RIVER

N the midst of the war between Syria and Israel, a band of Syrians, who were going about and plundering the country, carried away a company of captives, and among them was a little girl. She became a servant in the house of a great Syrian captain whose name was Naaman; and she waited on Naaman's wife.

Now Naaman was a great captain, and had led the armies of Syria to victory, but he had a grievous disease. He was a leper. And one day the little captive maid said to Naaman's wife, "If only my master could see the prophet who lives in Samaria, he would be recovered of his leprosy; for the prophet makes sick people well." And this was told to Naaman, and he believed it. "Thus and thus," they told him, "said the maid that is of the land of Israel."

There was peace at that time between the Syrians and the Israelites. So the king of Syria said, "Come, now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." And Naaman departed into Israel. taking with him ten talents of silver,

and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten robes of state, to pay the prophet. And he carried the letter to the king of Israel, at Samaria. And the letter said, "When this letter comes to you, I have sent my servant Naaman the captain, that you may recover him of his leprosy."

But when the king of Israel had read the letter, he was both amazed and troubled. "Am I a god," he said, "to kill and to make alive? Can I cure a man of leprosy? See, now, this is a plot against me. The king of Syria is seeking to make a quarrel with me!"

Elisha the prophet heard of the letter which the king of Syria had sent to the king of Israel, and he said, "You do not need to be amazed or troubled. Send the man to me." So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and with his servants behind him, a glittering company, and he stood before the door of the house of Elisha.

And Elisha sent out a messenger with this message, "Go wash in Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come again to you as it was before, and you shall be clean."

But Naaman was angry. "I expected," he said, "that he would come to receive me, and that he would stand and call upon the name of his god, Jehovah, and wave his hand over the place, and make me well. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of my own city of Damascus, better than all

the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean?" And he turned, and went away in a rage.

But the servants of Naaman were wiser than their master. They came near to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had bidden you do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, 'Wash and be clean'?"

And Naaman listened to his servants. Down he went to the river Jordan, and dipped himself in the river seven times according to the saying of the man of God. And behold, he was made well. His flesh came again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

So he returned from Jordan to Samaria, he and all his company, and came and stood before the man of God. And he said, "Behold, now, I know that there is no god in all the earth but in Israel. Therefore, I pray, take a present of your servant."

But Elisha said, "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will take nothing."

And the captain urged him to take it, but he refused.

Then said Naaman, "At least, let this be done. Let me have a load of the earth of this holy land, as much as two mules can carry; for the God of this land is now my God. From this time forth, I will offer neither burnt offer-

ing nor sacrifice to other gods, but only to the Lord Jehovah."

And he added, "Only one thing troubles me. I am a servant of the king of Syria, and when my master goes to worship in the house of his god, Rimmon, he leans upon my arm, and he bows and I must bow also. When I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon me."

And Elisha answered, "Go in peace."

So away went Naaman with his horses and his chariot, and his glittering retinue of servants, and two mules carried earth upon their backs so that Naaman even in Damascus might stand upon the soil of Israel.

But when he had gone a little way, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, said to himself, "Now my master has spared this Syrian captain in not receiving at his hands that which he brought, but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him."

So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from his chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?"

And Gehazi answered, "All is well. But my master has sent me, saying, 'Behold, even now there have come to me from the hills of Ephraim two young prophets. Give them, I pray you, a talent of silver and two robes of state.'"

And Naaman said, "Take two talents." And he urged him, and bound two talents in two bags with two robes of state, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they bare them before him. But before they came to Elisha, Gehazi stopped the servants, and took their burdens from their hands, and hid them. And he sent the men away.

Then he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said, "Where do you come from, Gehazi?"

And Gehazi answered, "I have not been away at all."

And Elisha said, "Was I not with you in spirit when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you? Is this a time to receive money and to receive garments? Is it a time to buy olive-yards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and menservants and maidservants? Are we to use the blessing of God to make us rich?"

And as he spoke, the sickness of Naaman came to Gehazi, and he went out of Elisha's presence a leper as white as snow.

XXIII

THE SIEGE OF SAMARIA

HERE was war again between Israel and Syria, and the city of Samaria was surrounded by the enemy. Nobody could go out; nobody could come in. Outside were farms and orchards, and food was growing out of the ground and on the trees; but also outside were the Syrians. So the markets of Samaria were empty, and the people were beginning to starve.

One day, the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, and a woman cried to him in sore distress. "Help! my lord O king," she said.

The king said, "How can I help you? What is left on the barn floor, or in the wine press? Only the Lord can help you. But tell me, what ails you?"

She said, "This woman" — pointing to her neighbour — "this woman and I made an agreement. Yesterday, she said to me, 'Give me your little son that we may eat him to-day, and to-morrow we will eat my son. Why should we all die of hunger? So we boiled my son, and ate him. And

to-day, I said to her, 'Give me now your son that we may eat him'; and she has hid her son."

Then the king of Israel laid hold upon his clothes and tore them, as men did in those days when they were in distress; and it was seen that the king's shirt was made of sackcloth, such as men wore when they were in bitter affliction.

And the king said, "God is our enemy, because Elisha the prophet is our enemy. Elisha could stop this famine, if he would. Why does he sit still while we suffer? God do so to me, and more also, if I let the head of Elisha stay on his shoulders till the sun go down this day."

Now Elisha was in his house, and the elders of Israel were with him. And they heard a man running down the street. And Elisha said, "See, there comes a messenger from the king. That son of a murderer has sent to take away my head. Quick! shut the door, and hold it fast against him. Wait till the king comes himself."

So they shut the door, and locked it, and kept the messenger out till the king should come. And while the messenger was trying to get in, and the friends of Elisha were holding the door against him, the king came.

The king said, "All this evil is the Lord's doing. Why should I wait any longer for the Lord?"

And Elisha said, "Hear the word of the Lord. To-mor-

row at this hour shall wheat and barley be cheap in this city. A measure of fine flour shall be sold for a piece of silver, and two measures of barley shall be sold for a piece of silver, in the gate of Samaria."

And one of the royal officers, on whose arm the king leaned, scorned the word of Elisha. "Yes," he said, "we shall see this when the Lord makes windows in the sky!"

Elisha said, "You shall see it with your eyes, but you shall not taste it with your lips."

Now, as the sun began to go down that day, four men who were lepers sat by the city gate. And they said one to another, "Why sit we here until we die? If we say, 'We will enter into the city,' there is the famine in the city, and we shall die; and if we sit still here, we die also. Now, therefore, come, let us venture into the army of the Syrians. If they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die. If we do nothing, we shall surely die."

So they arose in the twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians. But when they came to the uttermost part of the camp of the Syrians, behold, there was no man there! For the army of the Syrians had heard in the distance a noise as of the rattling of chariots, and a noise as of the prancing of horses, and a noise as of the marching of a great host; and they said one to another, "Lo, the king of Israel has

hired other kings to come and fight against us. Yonder come the kings of the Hittites, or the kings of Egypt!" And there arose a mighty panic in the camp, and the Syrians fled in the twilight. They left their tents, and their horses and their asses, and the camp as it was, and fled for their lives.

So the lepers came to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, and went into an empty tent, and found food there, and gold and silver. And they ate and drank, and carried thence silver and gold and costly clothing, and went and hid it. And they entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.

At last, they said one to another, "We do not well. This is a day of good news, and we keep it to ourselves. If we wait till the morning light, we shall surely be punished for this. Let us go back, and tell the king."

So they came in the middle of the night, and called to the watchman at the gate. They said, "We came to the camp of the Syrians, and behold, there was no man there, and no voice of any man, but horses tied and asses tied, and the tents as they were."

And the watchman called, and told it in the palace.

And the king arose in the night, and said to his servants, "I will tell you now what the Syrians have done to us.

They know that we are hungry, and they have gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, 'The men of Israel will come out into the empty camp, and we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.'"

And one of his servants answered, "Let us send men and see. If the men live, then they live; but if they die — why, in a little while we shall all die."

And the king said, " Go and see."

So they took two men mounted on horses, and sent them out, and they followed the track of the fleeing Syrians from the camp even to the river; and all the way, from Samaria to the Jordan, the road was strewn with garments and vessels which the Syrians in their wild haste had thrown away.

And the messengers returned and told the king. And the people went out in eager crowds, and plundered the camp of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a piece of silver, and two measures of barley were sold for a piece of silver, as the Lord had said by the mouth of Elisha.

As for the officer of the king who said, "Yes, we shall see this when the Lord makes windows in the sky," the king appointed him to keep the city gate; and in their haste the hungry people crowded upon him, and trod him underfoot. So he saw it with his eyes, but did not taste it with his lips.

XXIV

THE WILD RIDE OF JEHU

AMONG the captains of the army of Israel in the war against Ramoth-Gilead was one named Jehu.

One day, Elisha called a young prophet, and said to him, "Take this flask of oil, and go to Ramoth-Gilead, and when you get there look for a captain by the name of Jehu. Make him come apart from his companions into an inner room. Then take the flask of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, 'Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel.' Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not."

So the young man went to Ramoth-Gilead, and the captains were sitting together holding a conference of war. And the man said, "Captain, I have a message for you."

And Jehu said, "We are all captains; which of us do you mean?"

And the man said, "Captain, I mean you."

So Jehu arose, and led the prophet up the outer stairs on which he and the captains had been sitting, into an inner

room. And when they were alone the prophet poured the oil upon the captain's head, and said, " Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel." And he opened the door and fled.

Then came Jehu back to his companions, and stood at the top of the stairs. And the captains said, "Is all well, Jehu? What was this mad fellow's message?"

And Jehu said, "You know already."

"No," they said, "we know nothing about it. Tell us."

And he answered, "Thus and thus did he speak to me saying, 'Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel.'"

Then the men rose up in haste, with shouting, and they took every man his cloak, and put them on the top of the stairs, and set Jehu thereon, and blew with the trumpets, and cried, "Jehu is king! Jehu is king!"

Now the king of Israel at that time was Joram, the son of Ahab. He had been wounded in the war, and was in his palace in Jezreel, his northern capital, to recover from his hurt. And Ahaziah, the king of Judah, had come to visit him. So the two kings were in Jezreel.

And there stood a watchman on the tower of Jezreel and he saw a cloud of dust afar across the plain, as of men driving. And he called, and said, "I see a cloud of dust."

And the king of Israel said, "Take a horseman, and send him to meet the men, and let him say 'Is all well?'"

So one went out on horseback to meet the men, and said, "The king says, 'Is all well? Do you come in peace?'"

And Jehu said, "What have you to do with peace? Turn you in behind me."

The watchman said, "The messenger comes to the men, but he comes not again. He rides with them."

And the king sent out a second horseman, and he came to themand said, "The king says, 'Do you come in peace?'"

And Jehu answered, "What have you to do with peace? Turn you in behind me."

The watchman told the king, saying, "The second messenger comes to the men, but he comes not again. He rides with them. So on they drive, and the driving is like the driving of Jehu, for he drives furiously."

So the king of Israel said, "Make ready." And they made his chariot ready. And the two kings, the king of Israel and the king of Judah, went out, each in his chariot, against Jehu, and they met him close by Naboth's vineyard.

And when the king of Israel saw Jehu, he said, "Do you come in peace, Jehu?"

And Jehu cried, "Peace? How can there be peace in the

midst of the wickedness and the witchcraft of your mother Jezebel?"

Then Joram turned to Ahaziah, and cried, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" And the kings turned to flee. And Jehu, with his full strength, drew a bow, and struck the king of Israel between his shoulders, so that the arrow went through his heart, and he sank down in his chariot.

And Jehu said to one of his captains, "Take him up and cast him in Naboth's vineyard. Remember how you and I rode in the company of his father Ahab on the day when Elisha the prophet called down the curse of heaven. 'Thus saith the Lord,' said Elisha; 'Yesterday I saw the blood of Naboth and his sons, — your blood and the blood of your sons shall answer for it in this place.' Now, therefore, take him and cast him into this place, as the Lord said."

Meanwhile, Ahaziah, king of Judah, was fleeing for his life. And Jehu followed after him, and commanded his captains, "Him also! Smite him in his chariot." And the captains smote him, and his servants carried him in the chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him.

The news of the killing of the kings came to the ears of Jezebel. The queen was in the palace; and when she knew that death was in store for her also, she adorned her face, and attired her hair, and dressed herself as for a state occa-

sion. And she looked out of the window, and in came Jehu at the gate.

And Jezebel said, "Had ever any man peace who had killed his king?"

And Jehu lifted up his face to the window, and said, "Who is on my side? Who?"

And two or three servants thrust out their heads, and looked at him.

"Throw her down!" he said.

And they seized the queen and threw her down, and Jehu trod upon her with his horse.

Then he went in and ate and drank. And as he sat at the table, he said to his servants, "She was a bad woman, but she was the daughter of a king. Go now, and bury her." But they when came, behold, the dogs had eaten her, as Elisha said.

XXV

THE PRINCE'S GRANDMOTHER

HE was a bad grandmother: we may as well say that at once. Her name was Athaliah, and she was the daughter of Jezebel. She was of her mother's religion, and when she was married to the king of Judah and went down to Jerusalem to live, the first thing which she did was to have a temple built for Baal. She had also her mother's disposition. She was strong and masterful and cruel.

It seems a pleasant thing to belong to a royal family, and to live in a palace. Athaliah's grandfather had been king of Sidon; her father, Ahab, had been king of Israel; and, Joram, her husband, had been king of Judah. But those were hard times for kings; and they were even harder for the other members of royal families. For instance, when Joram came to the throne, he immediately killed all his brothers, so that none of them might conspire against him. Then, after he had been king a good while, an army of wild Arabs came up against Jerusalem, and broke into the Castle of Zion, and carried away all of Joram's treasures,

and also all his sons but one. Only his youngest son escaped. Then Joram fell sick, and so continued for two years in great pain, till he died.

Thus Ahaziah, the youngest son of Joram and Athaliah, came to the throne; and Athaliah was the queen-mother. But one day there came back a chariot from Jezreel, driven by men weeping and lamenting, and in the chariot was the body of Ahaziah, killed by Jehu. So the queen-mother had a new grief added to the old ones.

In the distress of this new grief, Athaliah did a dreadful thing; either because the affliction brought out all that was bad in her, or because it affected her mind. On the day when the chariot stopped at the palace door, and she came out and found that her son, the king, was dead, she killed all her grandchildren. All the boys and girls of Ahaziah's family, in the schoolroom, or out at play, or in the nursery — she had them caught and put to death.

"Now," said Athaliah, "I am again the queen!"

But one of the grandchildren, the youngest, a year old, escaped. He had an aunt, whose husband was Jehoiada, the chief priest; and they lived next door to the palace, in the temple. And when the aunt of little Joash saw what was going on, she picked him up and carried him to her own room, and hid him. So the men with the swords

did not get him. Of this, the grandmother knew nothing. She supposed that the baby had gone the way of all the others.

Then years passed, and years passed, till the little prince was at the age of seven. All this time his good aunt had taken care of him, and his grandmother had never seen him.

Then his uncle, Jehoiada, felt that the time had come to put an end to the reign of the bad grandmother, and he began to tell the secret of the hidden prince to men whom he could trust. "The true king," he said, "is in my house. He is the boy Joash, Ahaziah's son." Thus he made ready.

Now in the temple and in the palace, there were three guards of soldiers. And every Sabbath two of these companies were on duty in the temple, and one in the palace. And the custom was that in the afternoon, when the temple guards were relieved of their watch, the palace guard came over and took their places. So Jehoiada arranged that on a certain day, when the palace guard came to the temple, the temple guards should be kept standing. Thus there were no soldiers at that moment in the palace with the queen, but all the soldiers were in the temple with the priest. Then Jehoiada the priest called the captains. "Station your men," he said, "from the left corner of the temple, to the right corner of the temple, before the altar. Let them keep

the three gates. Arm them with spears and shields from the armory of David. Let them have their weapons in their hands."

And thus they stood; and Jehoiada brought out the little prince, the king's son; and he placed the crown upon his head, and the royal robes upon his shoulders. And the lad stood by the pillar, in the king's place, and looked as much like a king as his seven years would let him. And the soldiers shouted with a great shout and clapped their hands, and they cried, "Long live the king!"

Now Athaliah in the palace heard the shouting and the handclapping in the temple, and over she came to see what it was all about. And there was the little king beside the pillar, and the captains with him, and the trumpeters blowing on their trumpets, and all the soldiers shouting, and the people coming in and blowing on more trumpets, and all shouting, "God save the king!"

Then the wicked grandmother laid hold upon her gown and tore it, and cried, "Treason! Treason!"

And Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains and said to them, "Bring her out between the ranks, and whoever follows her, slay him with the sword." But no one followed. So Athaliah's reign was over, and her grandson, little Joash, ruled in her stead, with his wise uncle, Jehoiada, to help him.

XXVI

THE SHEPHERD AND THE CITY

EAR the little village of Tekoa, in the highlands south of Jerusalem, there lived a shepherd by the name of Amos. He had a flock of sheep, and he had also an orchard of sycamore trees out of whose dried fruit a kind of coarse bread was made. Neither of those possessions made him rich. He was a poor man, whose dwelling was in the rough fields, under the round roof of the sky.

The work of tending sheep has this advantage: it gives the shepherd plenty of time to think. Amos had hardly anything else to do. The sheep needed only to be led occasionally to fresh pastures, and to be protected from lions and bears. Amos sat upon the ground beside them, and leaned his back against a rock, and looked up among the clouds by day and among the stars by night and thought.

Sometimes a caravan came by; such as stopped in the old time on its way from Midian to Egypt, and carried off Joseph. The men of these caravans were traders, who

brought the spices of the East to sell in the markets of the South. The road lay beside the fields of Amos, and when they stopped to give their camels drink from the well at which he watered the sheep, he talked with them. He asked them questions about their own land and the countries which they visited, and they gave him news of the great world. They told him what was going on in Damascus and in Tyre; they described what they had seen in Israel and in Judah; they brought him the gossip of the nations. After they were gone, and all was still again, he thought about these things for days.

Sometimes he took the wool of his sheep, and went into cities to sell it. And he looked about him, noticing what buildings were there, and how the people dressed and behaved themselves. He observed the rich and the poor. He visited the courts of law, and listened to the judges. He attended services in churches, and watched the priests. Then he came home to his sheep, and in the stillness of the wild pastures, he thought of what he had seen and heard.

The more Amos learned about the world, the less he liked it. As he reflected upon it in his quiet days and nights, it seemed to him a bad world, filled with cruelty and greed. He hated it. He hated its kings and captains, and their

fierce fighting. He hated its rich merchants, who lived in splendid houses of hewn stone, and lay upon soft cushions on beds of ivory, and were entertained by skilful players on instruments of music, and drank wine out of bowls, while all the time they were cheating their neighbors, selling goods out of measures which were too small and in scales whose weights were too heavy, making men work long hours for little pay, charging high prices, afflicting the souls of the poor. He hated the priests, who busied themselves with beautiful services, and let this wickedness go on without a protest.

As Amos thought upon these things, he became sure that God felt concerning all this just as he did. "God," he said to himself, "cannot bless any nation which disobeys His laws. Wickedness shall certainly be punished. These great cities, where judges are bribed to give wrong judgments, and the rich sell the poor into slavery, and luxury lives next door to misery, shall be overthrown. They shall be terribly destroyed unless they repent, and change their ways."

It seemed to Amos very dreadful that people should be going on toward such a fate with nobody doing anything to prevent it. He felt like one who sees a boat drifting down a river, and knows that beyond are rapids and then a steep

fall, and that the people are bound to be drowned unless they turn about and row upstream or to the shore. At last, he heard the voice of God in his soul telling him to cry aloud and give a warning.

Then one day when Amos went to sell his wool in Bethel, in the place where the young prophet had cursed the altar and a lion had slain him, he told the city what was in his soul.

They were having a religious festival that day, and there was a procession through the streets, and a splendid service was to be held in the great church. All the people were assembling. And suddenly, there jumped up on a high step a sunburned man, in the dress of a rough shepherd, and called in a voice at which everybody stopped and listened.

"God," he cried, "shall surely punish the Syrians, and burn the palaces of Benhadad, for all their cruelty to our brethren in Gilead!"

And there was a clapping of hands, for the Israelites hated their old enemies, the Syrians.

"God," cried the shepherd, "shall punish the men of Ammon, God shall punish the men of Moab, He shall send fire among them for all their wickedness!"

Again there was a clapping of hands, and a sound of shout-

ing. Everybody approved, and hoped that the prophet spoke the truth.

Then the speaker pointed his finger straight at the listening people. "God," he cried, "shall likewise punish you! You are God's own people, and yet thus and thus have you done against God's will. These services, such as you hold to-day, cannot save you. Not for such things does God care. What He wants of you is honesty and purity and brotherly kindness and a righteous life. Repent, and do that which is good, else you shall be destroyed with a great destruction."

There was no clapping of hands, and no shouting of approval now. Men were sent to tell the king. "A man," they said, "in shepherd's dress, a wild man from Judah, is preaching treason from the steps of the church. He says that you shall be slain with the sword, and that our nation shall be destroyed."

And the priest came out. "O seer," he said, "go back to your land. There say what you will, and preach. You must not preach in this place. This is the king's residence, and this church is the king's sanctuary."

And Amos answered, "I came not of my own accord, and the words which I speak are not my words. The Lord God called me as I watched the sheep, and said, 'Go warn my

people Israel.' Thus saith the Lord, 'Unless you repent and change your ways, all this evil shall surely come upon you. But seek the Lord, and you shall live.'"

Then he went out of the city, and returned to the quiet pastures, and sat among the flocks, and wrote his sermons in a book.

XXVII

THE PRODIGAL WIFE

OSEA'S wife had gone away and left him. He was a grave man, who cared for serious things; she cared only for what she called a good time. He had been very patient; she had been very foolish.

They had three little children, and the names which Hosea gave them show how sad he was about the condition of his home. The oldest was a boy, and his name was Jezreel. His father named him for the place where Jehu the captain had killed the king. "The captain," he said to himself, "was false to his master whom he should have served and loved. I know what that means in my own experience."

The second child was a girl, and the name which Hosea gave her means "No Pity." When people said, "Hosea, that is a strange name which you have given to your little daughter: why do you call her that?" He said, "Because God shall cease to pity this wicked nation." For Hosea felt as Amos had felt concerning the life of Israel. And he knew

more about it than Amos could have known, because he lived in the midst of it. But the name had another meaning also. Hosea said to himself, "How can I look any longer with pity and forgiveness upon the conduct of my wife?"

Then when a little boy was born, Hosea called him by a name which means "Not My people." And again the neighbors wondered about it. "Hosea," they said, "this is the queerest name we ever heard. Why don't you call your boys Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or some respectable name like other folks? What do you mean by 'Not My People'?" He said, "The time approaches when the Lord shall say to this nation, 'You were my people, but now you are my people no longer, on account of your sins.'" But here, again, Hosea was thinking also of his own home. He was saying to himself, "Must I not say to my wife, 'She is not my wife'? She has separated herself from me by her wicked ways."

Then she went away and left him. And months passed, and months passed, and she did not come back. Sometimes he heard about her, but all that he heard was bad. She was in evil company. Then he learned that her first bad friends had forsaken her, and that she was now with those who were worse; and then with those who were worse still. He heard that she had lost her beauty and her gayety, and looked old

and sick and miserable. At last somebody came to him and said, "Hosea, I saw your wife this morning in the slave market. She has been deserted by all her companions, and the last of them is trying to sell her as a slave."

Immediately, Hosea went and bought her. He paid fifteen pieces of silver, and several bushels of barley. He took her home. There they sat down where they had once been happy, in the home which she had spoiled and abandoned. And the little children came to their mother and loved her; and Hosea loved her still, in spite of all that had happened.

The next day, Hosea called his neighbors together. "Friends," he said, "you know about the trouble in my family. Everybody knows it. And you have perhaps heard that I have taken my wife back. I wish to say a word to you.

"I have been taught a great truth, which, as I think upon it, seems to me almost the greatest truth there is. I have come to see that God is just as good as we are. It seems a strange thing to say, but we have not believed it. We have believed that the love of God is less constant than our own love, and that He is less pitiful and forgiving than we are. Friends, that is not so. Even as I love my wife in spite of all her sin, so does God love His people in spite of all their wickedness. The love of God is like the love of a mother for her child; it is like the love of a faithful husband for his

wife. God is greatly displeased at us, and He will surely let us suffer the pains and punishments which we deserve. But through it all, He loves us. When we return to Him in sorrow, He will receive us.

"Friends, I have changed the names which I have given to two of my children. My little daughter whom I called 'No Pity,' I now call 'Pity,' in remembrance of the great mercies of God. And my little son whom I named 'Not My People,' I now name 'My People,' for we are still God's people, and He is still our God."

Then Hosea went back into the house, and shut the door, and, like Amos, wrote a book.

XXVIII

WHISTLING FOR THE BEES

HERE was once a lad who bore the strange name of "Destruction and Deliverance." In the Hebrew language, which he and all his neighbors spoke, the name was Shear-Jashub; but that is what it means.

His father, Isaiah, had given him this name in order that he might be a kind of living motto. When anybody said, "What is your name?" and the lad replied, "Destruction and Deliverance," the questioner would always ask another question. He would say, "Where did you get such an extraordinary name as that?" And the boy would answer, "It is the subject of one of my father's sermons. My father says that this nation shall be destroyed but delivered."

One day Isaiah went to meet the king; and he took Destruction and Deliverance with him. The king of Judah at that time was Ahaz. Isaiah found him in the Fuller's Field, where, long before, the prophet Nathan had interrupted the conspiracy of Adonijah. There was Gihon, the Fountain, and, near by, beside the Serpent's Rock, was the

Dragon's Well. Out of these springs the Castle of Zion was supplied with water. The king had gone to see if there was water enough to last through a long siege. For the news had come that the enemies were on the way.

The long war between Israel and Syria had at last come to an end, and the two had united their forces in one army to fight the king of Judah. The reason was this: The two nations had become aware of a great danger. In the east, with Nineveh for their capital, lived the Assyrians. They were not contented with the high mountains, and the wide plains, and the strong cities of their own land; they proposed to own the world. So they reached out towards the sea. The first nation on their way was the kingdom of Syria, and the next nation was the kingdom of Israel. So the two nations said, one to another, "We must stand together, and we must get the kingdom of Judah to stand with us."

But Ahaz, king of Judah, refused to join them. So the kings of Israel and Syria sent him word saying, "We are coming down to take your crown from off your head, and to put it on the head of one who will join hands with us against the Assyrians." And down they came.

Thus it was that the prophet, with his little son holding his hand, found the king of Judah measuring the supply of water. Ahaz was in deep distress. He could see nothing

before him but disaster. His heart was moved, and the hearts of his people, as the trees in the wood are moved with the wind. They trembled like leaves. The king was afraid of his two neighbors who were coming to attack him; he was still more afraid to oppose Assyria.

Isaiah's plan was to stand still. He believed that Syria and Israel were not strong enough to hurt Judah. He believed also that the less Judah had to do with Assyria the better. To call the Assyrians to help Judah was as foolish as for a mouse to call a cat to help him against another mouse: the cat would surely eat them both.

Thus they talked, the prophet and the king, and the lad believed.

Some things were hard for him to understand. Isaiah said, "A child shall be born whom they will name Emmanuel — 'God is with us.' He shall find nothing to eat but cheese and honey, for all the cornfields and the vineyards shall be destroyed, and the people shall live on the milk of goats and on the honey of wild bees in the rocks. And before he knows the difference between good and bad, the two kings whom you dread shall be defeated."

The boy could not see why the child should be called by so great a name, unless his father meant that, even in that affliction, God would still be with them. He thought of his

own name, Destruction and Deliverance, and wondered what destruction his father meant, and what deliverance.

But other things were plain. Isaiah said, "Ahaz, do not be afraid of Israel and Syria. They cannot harm you. There is no more power left in them than there is flame in two smoking sticks of wood." The boy had often seen pieces of wood taken from the fire, and the flame that was in them flickered and went out, and there was nothing but ashes.

And Isaiah said, "Ahaz, if you are afraid of Israel and Syria, and do not trust in the Lord, but call the Assyrians to defend you, it will be like whistling for the bees of Assyria. And they shall come, and shall settle down in all the valleys, and upon all the rocks, and on all the bushes, and on all the pastures." The boy understood that his father meant the swarms of Assyrian soldiers, with swords sharp as the stings of bees.

To all this, Ahaz paid no heed. And Isaiah took the boy and went away in anger and in sorrow.

Ahaz said, "The Lord has forsaken me; I will get the help of other gods." He prayed to Moloch. He took his son, and kindled a fierce fire before the image of Moloch, and passed him through it as a sacrifice. But Moloch was

as deaf and dumb as the Baal to whom the priests prayed on Carmel. The enemy drew near.

Then Ahaz sent to Assyria. "Come," he said, "and defend me from Syria and Israel, and I will give you money." And he took gold and silver from the palace and the temple, and sent it as a present to the Assyrian king.

Thus the Lord, by the lips of Ahaz, whistled for the bees. The Assyrians came, and the invading armies of Syria and Israel fled before them. They took possession of Damascus, and smote the Syrians so that they were no more a nation. They became the masters of Israel. They became the masters of Judah also.

XXIX

THE GOD OF THE LAND

HENEVER they went out in the street, a lion met them. And every day there were more lions than there had been the day before. They came in from the fields and woods by two and threes. They roared at night, so loud that the people could not sleep for fear. There was a plague of lions.

The lions came in because the walls were broken down.

The Assyrians whom Ahaz had invited had come in their might. The men of Israel, who had been warned by Amos and Hosea, had paid no attention to the warning. They had gone on in their sins. Thus they had destroyed the strength of the nation, and the Assyrians had conquered them. The Lord had whistled for the bees, and the Assyrians in swarms, stinging as they came, had settled down upon the land.

The walls of the city of Samaria were overthrown. Outside the town, the farms and orchards looked as if they had been washed by floods and swept by cyclones; for the invaders had had their camp there for three years. Within

the town, the doors of all the houses had been battered in, and whatever was of any value had been carried out. Then the lions came.

Most of the people who were living at that time in Samaria were Assyrians. Not only had the walls been broken and the houses plundered, but most of the former inhabitants had been carried off. In long processions, thousands upon thousands, princes and merchants, rich and poor, fathers and mothers with their little children, the Israelites had been marched by soldiers out of their own land, which they were never to see again, into Assyria. And the Assyrian settlers had been sent to take their places.

Thus the people who saw a lion whenever they looked out of a window, and were afraid to go outdoors, were most of them Assyrians. They had moved into the empty houses, and were trying to rebuild the shattered city. But the lions stopped them.

They said, "What is the matter? Why do these wild beasts attack us?"

And somebody answered, "It is because we do not worship the god of the land. We have, indeed, brought our own gods with us, Adrammelech and Anammelech, and Nergal and Nibhaz. We have set up their images in the holy places. But the god of this land we know not. We have not even

heard his name. There was a god, for we have found his ruined temples, but there are no priests left to tell us how to pray to him. And now in his displeasure he has sent these lions." For they believed that every country had its own god, and every nation its own religion.

Then they sent men to Assyria to the king their master. And the men said, "O king, yonder in the kingdom of Israel which you have conquered, and in the city of Samaria which you have captured, your people are beset with lions. We have no peace. We hardly dare to stir out of our houses, lest the lions eat us. And this, O king, is because we do not know the god of the land. Send back, we pray, a priest of the religion of Israel that he may teach us, and this plague may cease."

So the king of Assyria sent a priest of the religion of Israel, and he taught them the worship of the Lord God. And the Assyrians who had settled in Samaria, and the Jews who had escaped when their neighbors were carried off, said their prayers together, and were called Samaritans.

As for the lions, little more was heard of them; especially after the city wall was built again.

XXX

THE WOLF AND THE FOLD

HE Fuller's Field was filled with men. They wore strange clothes, and the language which they spoke was strange. The top of the city wall was crowded with people of Jerusalem looking down at them, some in curiosity, some in fear, and some in anger.

The strangers stood outside the wall in the valley, and called loudly for the king. "We would see the king!" they said. "We would speak with Hezekiah, king of Judah."

So the word was brought to Hezekiah. "O King," cried the messenger, "the Assyrians have come again. Their army covers the Philistine plains. They are besieging Lachish, and they threaten to besiege us next. Their ambassadors stand in the Fuller's Field and demand the surrender of the city. They call for you."

And Hezekiah said, "What can I do more? I have paid the king of Assyria a great sum for the purchase of peace. I have given him all the silver that was in the treasury, and the golden ornaments of the Temple of the Lord. What does

he ask for now? Go, hear what his messengers have come to say."

Thus the officers of the king of Judah stood upon the wall above, and the officers of the king of Assyria stood beside the wall below.

The ambassadors said, "Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, 'Who is there that can help you?' You say, 'I have strength for the war.' Where is your strength? Do you put your trust in the Lord your God? He has forsaken you. It is even he who said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.'"

And the officers of Judah interrupted the speaker. "Speak," they said, "in your own language, for we understand it. Do not you say such words as these in the Jews' language, in the hearing of these people on the wall."

But the Assyrian cried in a louder voice than before, and in the language which all the people understood.

"Listen!" he said; "listen, all of you, to the message of the great king, the king of Assyria."

"Sennacherib, king of Assyria, warns you not to trust in Hezekiah, king of Judah. He cannot deliver you out of my hand. Make your peace with me, and come over to me. I will take you to a pleasant land. There shall each of you eat from his own vine and his own fig tree, and drink the

water of his own well. It is a land like your own land, full of corn and wine, and bread and vineyards, and olive trees and honey.

"Do not believe Hezekiah when he says that the Lord will save you. What God of all the nations has been able to deliver his people out of my hand? I came to the kingdom of Syria and conquered it; its capital city, Damascus, I destroyed. I came to the kingdom of Israel and conquered it; its capital city, Samaria, I overthrew. So it shall be here. The kingdom of Judah will I conquer, and your capital city, Jerusalem, will I bring down to the ground. I have robbed the treasuries of all the nations. I have gathered their riches as one gathers eggs out of a bird's nest; not one fluttered a wing, not one dared to open its mouth and peep. No power in heaven or on earth can hinder me. No man nor God can stop me."

Thus spoke the messenger of the king of Assyria, and he delivered a letter from his master to King Hezekiah in which all these things, and more also, were written. And the officers of the king took the letter in silence. They were frightened dumb. They answered not a word. Pale and trembling they carried the letter to the king.

And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up into the house

of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. And there he prayed. "O Lord, Thou art the God, even Thou alone of all the kingdoms of the earth. Save us now out of the hands of Sennacherib."

And he sent word of all these things to Isaiah, the prophet.

So the messengers of the king came to the prophet. And they said, "Thus saith the king, 'This is a day of trouble and destruction. What can be done? Shall we surrender to this terrible invader, or will God help us? Speak to God. Lift up your prayer for the Castle of Zion in this sore distress.'"

And Isaiah said to them, "Take this answer to your master. Thus saith the Lord, 'The Assyrian speaks great words. "I come," he says, "with the multitude of my chariots; I have laid waste walled cities into heaps of ruins."' Thus saith the Lord, 'All your might, O King of Assyria, is from me. You have done what I have permitted you to do. Now you come, like a wild beast, roaring and raging against me. Behold, I will put my hook in your nose, and my bridle in your lips, and will turn you back.'

"Thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, 'He shall not come into this city. Not a shield shall he lift up against it; not an arrow shall he shoot. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and the city shall be safe.'"

Thus did Isaiah answer the king, and thus did the king answer the Assyrian ambassadors. And back they went to give the message to Sennacherib. And as they came in sight of the Assyrian camp at Lachish, behold, the Assyrian army was already on the march. A plague had broken out among the soldiers, and they were returning to their own land in haste.

Thus the wolf came against the fold, and the Lord, the Shepherd of Israel, drove him away.

XXXI

THE BURNED BOOK

HE preacher had a congregation of one; but that made no difference to him. He preached straight on, first one sermon, and then another, and then still another. And the congregation listened with unfailing interest, and took notes.

The congregation's name was Baruch. He was secretary to the preacher, whose name was Jeremiah. A blank book lay on the table before him, and in it he wrote with pen and ink just what Jeremiah said.

The preacher's text was a great battle. Far in the north, at Carchemish on the river Euphrates, two ancient nations had fought for the supremacy of the world.

On one side were the Egyptians. They had marched up past Jerusalem, and had taken from Assyria all the lands between the Jordan and the sea. Josiah, king of Judah, had tried in vain to stop them, and had fallen on the field of battle. The kingdom of Judah had thus come under the rule of Egypt.

On the other side were the Chaldeans. They had marched up from Babylon, their capital, and had hurled their armies against the walls of Nineveh. Taking that city, the greatest in the world, they had overthrown the empire of the Assyrians. Thus that mighty nation, which had conquered and destroyed the kingdom of Syria and the kingdom of Judah, and had besieged Jerusalem, came to an end.

The two victorious armies, Chaldean and Egyptian, met; and the Chaldeans won the day. Being thus the masters of the world, they were the masters of the kingdom of Judah.

Now it had been long the conviction of Jeremiah that Jerusalem must be destroyed. He had said so publicly and often, and the people hated him for saying it.

One time, he had called the priests around him, and taking a bottle had dropped it on a rock, and had said, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Even so will I break this people and this city.'" And one of the priests had struck him in the face, and had put him in the stocks.

Another time, he had stood in the gate of the Temple, and cried aloud to all the people, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place; but if you go on still in your wickedness, and steal and murder and commit adultery, I will cast you out

of my sight. This holy place, this holy city, shall be destroyed, and the land shall become a desolate wilderness.'"

They tried to kill him. They put him on trial for high treason.

The priests said to the princes, "This man must be put to death. You have heard with your own ears what he has said against the Temple and against the city."

But Jeremiah answered, "I have spoken only what the Lord gave me to speak. And listen now! I say it over again. Amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of God; He may repent Him of the evil which He has pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I am in your hand. Do with me as it seems good to you. But know for certain that if you put me to death you shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon all this nation."

And the princes said to the priests, "This man must not be punished, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God."

So Jeremiah was released. But the people went on, bad as ever.

Now that the battle was fought, and the Chaldeans were the masters of the world, Jeremiah was more sure than ever.

"This city," he said, "shall be destroyed, and the Chaldeans shall destroy it."

Then he called Baruch, and gave him ink and pen and paper, and repeated to him his warning sermons, the Sermon of the Bottle, and the Sermon at the Gate, and many more. And Baruch wrote them down. "Perhaps," said Jeremiah, "the kingdom of Judah may yet give heed to all the evil which the Lord proposes to do to this people, and they may return each from his evil way, that the Lord may forgive their iniquity and their sin."

So the blank pages of the book were filled. Then said Jeremiah, "Baruch, I cannot go into the Temple. You go, and read what you have written." And Baruch did as Jeremiah commanded him. It was a fast-day, and the Temple was filled with people, and Baruch stood at one of the gates, and read out of his book to all who stopped and listened.

Now the princes were sitting together in the royal palace, and when they heard what was being done, they sent for Baruch. "Sit down now," they said, "and read this in our hearing."

So he sat down and read, and when they had heard from beginning to end they were afraid, and said to Baruch, "We must surely tell the king of all these words."

And they asked Baruch, saying, "Tell us now, how did you write all these words?"

And Baruch answered, "He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book."

Then the princes said to Baruch, "You and Jeremiah go and hide yourselves, and let no man know where you are."

And they told the king. And Jehoiachin the king sent for the book, and one began to read it to him.

Now the king was sitting in his winter-house, and there was a fire burning on the hearth before him. He listened; at first with contempt, then with impatience, and then with great anger. At last, he rose up, after two or three pages had been read, and took the book out of the hand of the reader, and cut it in pieces with his penknife, and threw it piece by piece into the fire that was on the hearth, till it was all burned.

But the king and his servants were neither alarmed nor repentant. They went on still in their wicked way. The king commanded men to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah, but they could not find them. Then Jeremiah took another book and gave it to Baruch; and again the preacher preached to the congregation of one. He repeated all the former sermons and added others. And Baruch wrote them word for word.

XXXII

THE CAPTURE OF THE CASTLE

OR the first time in more than a year, the city gates were opened, and the creaking of their rusty hinges was like the crying of children.

In the city, during that hard year, children had cried for hunger. The Chaldeans had encamped about Samaria. The gates were shut; no farmers could come in with food. But now, the Egyptians had attacked the Chaldeans in the rear, and the Chaldeans had gone to chase them home.

The gates being open, and men continually going out and coming in, Jeremiah said to himself, "I will go and look at my farm." For during the siege, while the enemy occupied all the country roundabout, Jeremiah had done a singular thing: he had bought a farm. The Chaldeans were encamped upon the place, and the prophet was saying every day, "The Chaldeans shall take this city and destroy it." It seemed impossible that he could ever occupy the farm; and if he ever did, people wondered what he would do with

it, for, while he knew how to handle pens and ink, he knew nothing whatever about ploughs or pruning-hooks. But Jeremiah's reason for buying the farm was this. He believed that destruction was certain, but he believed also that deliverance would follow it. The people of Judah must be carried away, as the people of Israel had been, but they would surely return. So he bought the farm as an act of faith.

"Now," he said, "I will go and look at it. I will see what the Chaldeans have done to my vines and fig trees."

But at the gate, the captain of the guard arrested him. He laid hold on Jeremiah. "You are a deserter," he said; "you are going over to the Chaldeans. You have been on their side all along, telling us to surrender the city to them. Now you are going to get your reward. You are starting out to join the enemy."

"It is false," said Jeremiah. "I have bought a farm, and I am on my way to look at it. I am not going over to the Chaldeans."

But the captain paid no heed to anything that Jeremiah said. They brought him to the princes, and the princes had him beaten and put in prison.

The king, however, was Jeremiah's friend. He was a weak king, who was almost as much afraid of the princes

THE DESOLATED CITY

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as he was of the Chaldeans. He dared not favor Jeremiah publicly. But he summoned him in secret to the palace. The king said, "Jeremiah, is there any word from the Lord?"

Jeremiah said, "There is. The Lord says, 'Do not think that the Chaldeans will not return to fight against the city. They will surely come back, and fight against it, and take it, and burn it.' And you, O king, shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." Moreover, Jeremiah said, "What crime have I committed that I am put in prison? Let me not be taken back there, lest I die."

So the king delivered the prophet from the prison, but kept him under guard, and every day they gave him a loaf of bread from the baker's street until all the bread in the city was gone. Nevertheless, Jeremiah said continually to the soldiers in the court of the guard, "This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon. They who would save their lives, let them desert to the enemy. They who stay die by the sword, by the famine, and by the plague."

And the princes heard that he said these things to the soldiers.

So the princes said to the king, "This man must be put to death. He weakens the courage of the army and of all

the people by such words. This man seeks not our welfare but our hurt."

And the weak king answered, "He is in your hands. Do what you will with him."

Then they took Jeremiah and let him down with cords into a deep well. There was no water in the well, only deep mud in the bottom, and Jeremiah sank in the mire.

Then went a friend of Jeremiah to the king, and told him what was done. "Jeremiah has done no wrong," he said, "and now, O king, he dies!" And the king said, "Go, take him up." And the friend took men with him, and rags and worn-out garments; and they let down the rags and garments to the prophet in the bottom of the well, and called down to him, and said, "Jeremiah, put these rags and old clothes under your arms under the cords." And Jeremiah did so, and they pulled him up.

And the king summoned him in secret to the Temple; and the king said, "Jeremiah, I would like to ask you something. Tell me, and hide nothing from me."

And Jeremiah said, "If I tell you, will you promise not to have me put to death?"

The king said, "As the Lord liveth, in whom we live, I will not put you to death; neither will I give you into the hands of the men who seek your life."

And Jeremiah answered the king, "Thus saith the Lord, 'If you surrender to the king of Babylon, you shall be saved, and the city shall not be burned. But if you do not surrender, then shall the Chaldeans take the city and destroy it.'"

The king said, "I am afraid to surrender. My own people will kill me."

So the siege continued. Every day the Jews grew weaker, and the Chaldeans grew stronger. At last, the battering-rams of the Chaldeans broke the wall, and in came the captains and the soldiers. And the king and his officers opened a gate on the other side of the city, and fled for their lives. But the Chaldeans overtook them.

Thus the Castle of Zion was captured. And the Chaldeans burned the palace and the Temple and the houses. And they took the pillars of brass which stood before the Temple, and the brazen sea, and broke them in pieces to carry them to Babylon. All the vessels of brass and of silver and of gold, they took away. And the people they marched in long processions, the king and the princes and the priests, the rich and the poor, fathers and mothers and their little children, out of Judah and over the Jordan and across the deserts to the land of Babylon.

XXXIII

MOVING PICTURES

HEN the procession of exiles from Jerusalem came to the land of Babylon, they were met by other exiles who were there already. These men had been taken captives by the Chaldeans ten years before. Out they came along the road with lamentation and mourning to meet their brethren.

"Can it be true?" they cried. "Can it be true that our holy city has been captured and destroyed? Has the kingdom of Judah come to an end? Is the Temple of God burned? Do the high walls of the Castle of Zion lie upon the ground? Ezekiel told us that all this must come to pass, but we could not believe him."

For while Jeremiah, in Jerusalem, had been declaring that the Chaldeans would surely take the city, Ezekiel had been saying the same thing in the land of Babylon. He had been preaching it in sermons: he had been showing it in pictures.

Sometimes he made the pictures with his hands, while

OUT OF THE CAPTURED CASTLE

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the people stood and watched him. Sometimes he described the pictures which he had seen in dreams.

One day he took a large flat brick, such as the Chaldeans used to write on, and drew upon it a plan of Jerusalem. There were the walls and the streets, and the Temple in the midst; and outside were the tents of the enemy, and their battering-rams. And Ezekiel held a great piece of sheet iron between him and the picture of the city. And when the people said, "What does this mean, Ezekiel?" he answered, "Thus shall Jerusalem be besieged, and thus shall the Lord make a wall of iron between Him and His people. They shall be in distress, and He will not help them."

One day he said, "I saw the Temple filled with idols. All the walls of the holy place were painted over with the forms of beasts and snakes, creeping and crawling things. And before these images stood men of Judah with censers in their hands, and a thick cloud of incense rose as they worshipped these idols in the house of God. And outside were women weeping as they prayed to the God of the Spring. And at the door of the Temple were men with their backs to the altar of the Lord, worshipping the sun. And a voice called for the destroyers, and they came with weapons in their hands, and began at the Temple and went through all the city, slaying as they went."

"Jerusalem," said Ezekiel, "has forsaken God; and God has forsaken Jerusalem."

Again he said, "I saw the Temple filled with cloud, and in the cloud a fire flashing like lightning, and in the fire the likeness of a throne, and upon the throne the brightness of the glory of the Lord. And the throne had whirling wheels, and beside the wheels were living creatures, with wings, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of great waters, like the noise of an army. And the wheels whirled, and the living creatures lifted up their wings, and the throne was carried out of the Temple toward the east."

The people said, "What does this mean, Ezekiel?"

And he answered, "The Lord has departed from Jerusalem, and has come to dwell with us here, in the east."

Thus had Ezekiel taught the people in the land of Babylon, telling them not to expect to return to their own country, and declaring again and again, like Jeremiah, that Jerusalem must be destroyed. Then had come one day a messenger from Judah to Babylon, at the sight of whom, as he came riding down the road, the hearts of the exiles sank within them.

"All is lost!" he cried. "The king of Babylon has broken down the Temple of the Lord; and the holy place has he defiled, and made Jerusalem a heap of stones. The smoke

of the burning city rises to the clouds, and behind me, weeping and lamenting, come the people into exile."

Then Ezekiel began to comfort his people. They settled down together by the waters of Babylon, the new exiles and the old, and wept as they remembered Zion. But Ezekiel said, "After destruction comes deliverance, after repentance comes forgiveness. Turn now from your sins which have displeased God, put away your idols. God will bless you. You shall be brought back to your own land."

One day he said, "As I dreamed, I was in the midst of a valley. There had been a fearful battle fought there in some forgotten war; and the valley was strewn with the dry bones of dead men. The whole ground was covered with them, and they were very dry. And the Lord said, 'Son of man, can these bones live?'

"And I answered, 'O Lord, thou alone knowest.'

"And He said, 'Speak now to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the words of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, I will put breath into you that ye may live. I will put sinews upon you, and will clothe you with flesh and will cover you with skin, and ye shall live.'

"And I spoke to the dry bones, and as I spoke there was an earthquake, and the bones came together, bone to bone, heads and bodies, legs and arms. And sinews came upon

them, and flesh clothed them and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. And the Lord said, 'Son of man, speak now to the four winds, and say to the breath of the winds, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe down upon these slain that they may live.' And I spoke as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, a mighty army."

The people said, "Ezekiel, we see the picture, but what does it mean?"

And Ezekiel said, "It means you, friends. It means that though you are like men dead and buried here in the land of Babylon, yet shall the Lord raise you up, and restore you to your own land."

Again Ezekiel said, "I dreamed that we were all back again in our own country, and there came a mighty army against us. The great king Gog, ruler of all the heathen nations of the world, came from the far north, all of them riding on horses, all of them armed with sword and shield and buckler. On they came, as a storm of thunder rolls along the sky. And I saw the Lord fighting for us with an earthquake. All the fishes of the sea, and the birds of the sky, and the beasts of the field, and all men, trembled. And the mountains were torn apart, and all the high cliffs toppled over, and every wall fell to the ground. And the vast army of the

invaders was defeated; the fire of the Lord destroyed them. And we went out from our cities and gathered up their bucklers and their wooden shields, their pikes and their spears, their bows and arrows, and piled them up in our yards for firewood. And for seven years we never needed to cut down a tree to burn. And the land was free from all its foes forever.

"I saw the Castle of Zion rebuilded, stronger than ever; and a new city, and a new Temple, splendid beyond all the splendor of Solomon, and in the midst of it the Lord God blessing the people of the Lord."

XXXIV

THE MASTER OF THE MAGICIANS

EARS and years after, when Hebrew children sat around the fire at night, and said, "Father, tell us what happened to our people when they lived in the land of Babylon," they were told some of the most wonderful stories in the world.

It came to pass in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon and destroyer of Jerusalem, that the king had a strange dream, and his spirit was troubled and his sleep went from him. The king called the magicians, and they came in and stood before him.

The king said to them, "I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know what it means."

And the magicians answered, "O king, live for ever. Tell us the dream, and we will tell you what it means."

But the king said, "I have forgotten the dream. It was a strange dream, and I awoke in a fright, but what it was I cannot say. That is why I called you. Tell me first the dream, and then the meaning."

They said, "We will explain the dream, if you will only tell us what it was."

Then the king of Babylon was angry. "I see," he said, "what you have in your minds. You are trying to gain time, and are planning to tell me lies. Come, now, without delay, tell me this moment what I dreamed and what it meant. If you do this, you shall be rewarded with gifts and great honors. If you do not do it, you shall be cut limb from limb."

And the king beckoned to his executioner.

Then the magicians cried out before the king. "There is no man on earth," they said, "who can show the king's matter. Never in the world did any king ask such a thing of any magician. What the king asks is too difficult; the gods only can answer it."

But the king was more angry and furious than before. "Go," he said to his executioner, "find out all the magicians in Babylon, and take off their heads."

Now among the magicians was a man named Daniel. He was a Jew, and had been brought away out of the kingdom of Judah. He was the first man whom the executioner met when he went to execute the king's decree. Daniel said, "Wait, bring me before the king. I will tell him what he dreamed, and what it means."

So Daniel came before the king. And the king said, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation of it?"

And Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "You have asked a thing, O king, which no magician on the earth can answer. But there is a God in heaven who speaks in secret to the souls of men. He has spoken to you, O king, to tell you what shall come to pass hereafter, and He has spoken to me also. I know the strange dream which you dreamed, and I know its interpretation.

"You saw, O king, a great and very bright image, standing before you, terrible to look upon. The head of the image was of fine gold, its breast and arms were of silver, its body was of brass, its legs of iron, its feet part of iron and part of clay. And as you looked, there came a stone thrown by some unseen hand, which struck the image on its feet and broke them, and down fell the image; and the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold were broken into bits so small that a strong wind came and blew them all away, as the winds blow the chaff from the threshing-floor. Then the stone which struck the image grew and grew, and became a great mountain, and filled all the earth.

"This was your dream, O king. Now listen, while I tell you what it means.

"You are a king of kings. The God of heaven has given you power and strength and glory. Wherever men live upon the earth, and there are beasts in the field and birds in the sky, you are ruler of them all. You are that head of gold. But after you shall arise a kingdom inferior to you, and after that another and another, each worse than the one before, silver and brass and iron and clay. Then shall God set up a kingdom which shall destroy all these kingdoms, but shall never be destroyed. This is that stone which smote the image, and became a mountain."

Then the king said to Daniel, "Of a truth, your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets."

And the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many gifts, and appointed him master of the magicians.

But after that, the king dreamed another dream, and he awoke greatly troubled. And none of the magicians could explain the dream, till Daniel came.

"O Daniel," said the King, "I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and that no secrets are hid from you; tell me now the meaning of my dream.

"I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, a great tree, whose height reached to heaven, and it could be seen from all the ends of the earth. The leaves of it were fair, and its fruit abundant, and the beasts of the field lived

under the shadow of it, and the fowls of the air dwelt in its branches. But as I dreamed, down came a holy one from heaven. He cried aloud, 'Hew down the tree, cut off its branches, shake off its leaves, scatter its fruit, let the beasts and the fowls flee from it. Leave only the stump of its roots in the ground. Feed it with the grass of the field; wet it with the dew of heaven. Let seven times pass over it.' And a voice said, 'The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth to whomsoever He will.' Then I awoke."

Then Daniel, when he had heard the dream, was amazed and dumbfounded, and his thoughts troubled him.

And the king said, "O Daniel, let not the dream or its interpretation trouble you. Tell me plainly what it means."

And Daniel answered, "My lord, the dream be to those who hate you, and its interpretation to your enemies.

"This great and strong tree is yourself, O king, whose dominion is to the ends of the earth. And as the holy one from heaven smote the tree, so shall you, O king, be smitten. You shall be driven from the dwellings of men, and shall live in the fields with the beasts. You shall eat grass like oxen, and shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and so shall it be for seven years, until you know of a truth that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will."

A year after, as Nebuchadnezzar walked in his palace in Babylon, and looked out over the city, he said to himself, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?"

And as he spoke, a madness fell upon him. He was driven from men, and did eat grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. Thus he lived for seven years.

Then one day his reason returned to him, and he stood upon his feet, and blessed God. "For His dominion," he said, "is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom from generation to generation. His works are truth, and His ways judgment, and those who walk in pride He is able to abase."

XXXV

THE FIERY FURNACE

NCE upon a time, when Nebuchadnezzar was king in Babylon and the Jews were there in exile, the king set up an image of gold, a hundred feet high, in the plain of Dura. And to the dedication of this image, he called all the great men of the kingdom, — the princes, the governors, and the captains; the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs; and all the rulers of the provinces.

So they came, and a multitude of people with them, and stood before the golden image. And a herald cried aloud, and said, "To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of music, — the cornet, flute, harp, psaltery, dulcimer, and other instruments, — ye fall down and worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. And whosoever falls not down and worships shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace."

Then the music sounded, the band played, and down fell

the people. All the princes, all the governors, all the captains, all the judges, the treasurers, and the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces worshipped the golden image.

Then came certain men and made a complaint before the king. "O king," they said, "you made a decree that when the band played in the plain of Dura, everybody should fall down before the golden image, or else be cast into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace. But, O king, there are three Jews, one named Shadrach, another named Meshach, and the third named Abed-nego, who have paid no heed to your command. They serve not your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up."

Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and fury commanded that these Jews should be brought before him; and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were brought before the king.

The king said, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if you are ready to fall down when the band plays, and worship the golden image in the plain of Dura, well. But if not, then you shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace. And who is the God who can deliver you out of my hands?"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, we are in no doubt as to our answer in this matter. If you put us into the hottest furnace in your land, the Lord our God will surely deliver us out of it. And in any case, we give you notice that we will not serve your gods, O king, nor will we worship the golden image which you have set up."

Then was Nebuchadnezzar filled with fury, and his face was as the face of a man in great anger. He gave command to heat the furnace seven times hotter than it had ever been heated. He charged strong men to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that they might be cast into the burning, fiery furnace. So they were bound in their coats, their stockings, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning, fiery furnace. And the fire was so hot that the men who threw them in were burned in the flames which came from the furnace door. And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego fell down bound into the midst of the fiery, burning furnace.

But the king arose in great astonishment, and looked into the furnace. He said to his counsellors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?"

They answered, "True, O king."

He said, "Lo, I see four men unbound walking in the

midst of the fire, and they have no hurt! And the form of the fourth is like to a son of the gods!"

And the king came near to the door of the burning, fiery furnace. "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego," he said, "ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come hither."

And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego came forth out of the midst of the fire. And the princes, the governors, and the captains, and all the king's counsellors crowding together to that sight, saw these men upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed, nor were their coats changed; nor even the smell of fire had come upon them.

And Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him. There is no other god who is able to deliver as this one."

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in the province of Babylon.

XXXVI

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST

HERE was a feast, that night, in the king's palace, in Babylon, a feast for a thousand nobles. And King Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's son, had given command to bring to the table the gold and silver vessels which his father had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. And out of the gold and silver cups of the Lord's House, the king and his thousand nobles, and all the ladies of the court, drank wine. They drank wine, and praised the gods of Babylon, made of gold, of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

But in the midst of the feast, as the lights blazed, and the music sounded, and the people ate, drank, and were merry, suddenly along the white wall of the king's palace, by the golden candlestick, moved the figure of a man's hand, and wrote. There was the writing, plain and black on the white wall. But it was in a strange language. Nobody could read it.

Mene. Tekel. Peres. Thus stood the mysterious inscrip-

tion. And at the sight of it the music stopped, the nobles and the ladies sat in frightened silence, and the king trembled so that his knees smote one against another. The king cried aloud for the magicians, and the wise men of Babylon were called.

And the king said to the magicians, "Whoever shall read this writing and show me the interpretation of it shall be clothed in scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

But not a wise man of them all could read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation of it.

Then was King Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his face was as the face of a man in fear and distress, and all his nobles were amazed and perplexed. Nobody knew what to do.

At last the queen spoke. And the queen said, "O king, do not be troubled. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods. Your father found in him such light and understanding and wisdom of the gods, that he made him master of the magicians. He could interpret dreams, and read riddles, and dissolve doubts. Let Daniel be called, and he will show the meaning of the writing."

Then was Daniel brought in before the king.

And the king said, "Are you that Daniel, whom my father brought from Judah, and made master of the magicians? I hear that the spirit of the gods is in you, and great wisdom. Now, the wise men have been brought in before me to read this writing and show me what it means, and they cannot do it. But you can make interpretations and dissolve doubts. If you can read these words and explain them, you shall be clothed in scarlet, and have a chain of gold about your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, "O king, keep your gifts, and give your rewards to another. Yet I will read the writing, and make known the interpretation of it. O thou king, the Most High God gave your father the kingdom, and majesty, and glory and honor, and all nations trembled before him. Whom he would, he slew; and whom he would, he kept alive. But when his heart was lifted up with pride, God put him down from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. He was driven from the dwellings of men. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he learned that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.

"But you, his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you know all this. You have exalted yourself

against the Lord of Heaven. The vessels of the Lord's House have been brought before you, and you and your nobles and the ladies of your court have drunk wine from them. You have praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone. And the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, you have not glorified.

"Therefore was the hand sent, and these words were written. And this is what they mean.

"*Mene*, numbered. God has numbered your kingdom and finished it.

"*Tekel*, weighed. You are weighed in the balance and found wanting.

"*Peres*, divided. Your kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

Then Belshazzar gave command, and they clothed Daniel in scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

That night, the Medes and Persians came. Babylon was taken; Belshazzar was slain; and Darius reigned in his stead.

XXXVII

THE DEN OF LIONS

HE princes disliked the presidents. There were a hundred and twenty princes, and three presidents. The business of the princes was to govern the kingdom of Babylon; but the princes were governed by the presidents, and the presidents by the king. The princes turned in their accounts to the presidents. If they did well, the presidents praised them; if they did ill, the presidents blamed them, and told them that if they did not do better they would report them to the king. The princes did not like it.

The first of these presidents was Daniel. He was preferred above all the princes and the presidents because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king trusted him. But the princes and the other presidents sought to find some fault in him, that they might accuse him to the king, and bring him down from his high place.

They looked here and they looked there to find a good complaint against the president, but they could discover nothing. Daniel was faithful in all things, and there was

WHOM THE KING DELIGHTETH TO HONOUR

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no error in him. At last they said, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God."

Then they came to King Darius, and said, "O king, all the presidents of the kingdom, the governors and the princes, the counsellors and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of you, O king, shall be cast into a den of lions. Here is the law which we have written. All that is now needed is the signing of your name."

It seemed to the king a good law; he found no harm in it. So he signed it.

Now when Daniel knew that the law was signed, and that all prayers for thirty days must be made to the king only, and that any disobedience would be punished by the lions, nevertheless he prayed to God according to his daily custom. He paid no attention to the law. He went into his house, and having his windows open towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees and said his prayers and gave thanks before his God, as he had done before. This was what the presidents and the princes were sure would happen. They looked in at the open windows, and there was Daniel praying.

So they hastened to the king. "O king," they said, "did you not sign a decree that every man who should ask a petition of any god or man, save yourself, within thirty days, should be cast into the den of lions?"

The king answered and said, "The thing is true, and the law of the Medes and Persians cannot be changed."

Then they cried aloud, and said, "That Daniel, who was brought as a captive out of Judah, regards you not, O king, neither does he give heed to the decree which you have signed, but three times every day he makes his petitions to his God."

And the king saw that the princes had deceived him. He saw that they had laid a plot against Daniel. And all that day, till the going down of the sun, he labored to deliver him.

But as the sun was setting, the crowd of princes came into the king's presence; and they said, "You know, O king, the customs of the Medes and Persians. No law which the king has signed can be changed, even by the king."

So the king gave command, and they brought Daniel to cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke and said to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, will deliver you."

Then Daniel was cast in among the hungry lions, and a

stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his nobles. One end of a cord was fastened with wax on one side of the stone, and the other end was fastened with wax on the other side of the stone, and the king and his nobles pressed the seals of their rings into the wax. Thus nobody could stir the stone without breaking the seals; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting; neither did he sleep. And very early in the morning, he went in great haste to the den. There was the stone, and the sealed cord, and the lions could be heard roaring within.

And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice to Daniel. And the king said, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is your God whom you serve continually able to deliver you from the lions?"

And Daniel answered, "O king, live forever. My God has sent his angel and has shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me, because I am innocent before Him, and I am innocent also before you, O king."

Then was the king exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

And the king commanded, and they brought the princes and the presidents who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, and the lions ate them up and broke their bones in pieces before they reached the bottom of the den. And the king said, "The God of Daniel, he is the living God, and steadfast forever; who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

"But, father," said the Hebrew children, when they had heard these stories, "did these wonders really happen? Did Nebuchadnezzar eat grass like an ox? Did the hand write on the wall of the palace of Belshazzar? Did the Lord deliver His servants from the fiery furnace, and from the den of lions?"

And the father said, "Children, I was not there, and my grandfather, who told me the stories which I tell you, was not there either. But this was true then, and is true to-day, that the Lord humbles the proud, and brings down the mighty from the seats, and saves those who trust in Him out of all their troubles."

XXXVIII

THE HANGING OF HAMAN

AHASUERUS the king made a feast for all his princes and his nobles. The room was hung with fair cloths of white and green and blue, fastened with purple cords to silver rings in pillars of marble. All the couches on which they lay to eat and drink, according to their custom, were gold and silver. And the cups which held the wine were of fine gold.

Also Vashti the queen made a feast at the same time for all the ladies of the court.

Now when the heart of the king was merry with wine, so that he did not well know what he was about, he sent for the queen to come to the table with the men. But the queen refused to come.

And the king was very angry. He called for his wise men and said, "What shall be done to the queen who refuses to obey the king?"

And the chief of the wise men answered, "O king, the queen has put us all in danger. If her disobedience is not

punished, then all our wives, and all the wives in your dominions, will disobey their husbands. But punish her by putting her away, and all the wives will give to their husbands honor, both to great and small."

And the saying pleased the king, and he did according to the counsel of the wise man.

Then the king appointed officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather together in his palace all the most beautiful maidens of the land, that he might choose another queen.

Now there was in the king's city a Jew named Mordecai, who had been carried away captive from Jerusalem in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. He had an adopted daughter whose name was Esther; and Esther was very beautiful, and as good as she was fair. She came among the many maidens to the palace of the king, and out of them all the king chose her to be his queen. But Esther did not tell the king that she was the daughter of Mordecai the Jew, for Mordecai had charged her not to make it known.

So Esther was the queen of all the land, and the king set the royal crown upon her head.

One day, two of the king's servants laid a plot to kill him, and they talked together of what they meant to do, and Mordecai heard them. He told it to Esther, and Esther told the king. So the king's life was saved.

Now the chief man in the city was named Haman. He was a proud person, and when he came in sight all the people fell down before him and touched the ground with their foreheads. But Mordecai stood still. He did not bow down nor prostrate himself. And Haman was very angry. He hated Mordecai. And when he found that Mordecai was a Jew, "Now," he said, "I will be avenged not only on Mordecai but on all his people."

And Haman spoke to the king. "There is a certain people," he said, "scattered abroad in all the provinces of your kingdom, who are different from us. Their language is not our language, their customs are not our customs, and their laws are not our laws. If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed. I will myself pay ten thousand talents of silver to have it done."

And the king took his ring from off his finger, and gave it to Haman, as a token of authority, and said, "Do as you please."

So Haman made preparations to have the Jews destroyed. Letters were sent by runners into all the king's provinces, saying that on a certain day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, all Jews, old and young, even to the little children, should be put to death.

Now when Mordecai knew what was done, he put on

sackcloth and strewed ashes on his head, and went out into the midst of the city and cried with a loud and bitter cry. And in every province there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting and weeping and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. And the tidings came to Esther, and she sent a servant to Mordecai to find out what it meant. And Mordecai told him of the decree against the Jews, and sent word to Esther to beg the king to spare her people.

Then Esther put on her royal apparel and stood in the door of the hall where the king sat on his throne. And the king held out toward Esther the golden sceptre which was in his hand. That was the sign that she might come near. So she came near, and touched the top of the sceptre.

The king said, "What will you have, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom."

And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come to-day to a banquet which I have prepared."

So they came, the king and Haman. And Haman was more proud than ever, being thus invited to dine with the king and queen.

And at the banquet, the king said again, "Esther, what is your petition? What is your request?"

And Esther said, "If I have found favor in the sight of the

king, and if it please the king to grant my petition and to perform my request, let the king and Haman dine with me again to-morrow, and I will do as the king has said."

Then Haman went forth joyful and glad of heart. It was plain that he was the greatest man in all the king's dominions. He was more proud than ever. And the people bowed down before him till their foreheads touched the ground. But Mordecai stood still. He made no bow. And Haman went home and told his wife. "I am promoted," he said, "above all the princes of the king. The queen has asked no man but me to dine together with the king. Yet I cannot be satisfied, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew giving me no reverence. What shall I do?"

His wife said, "The thing to do is to have a gallows erected, seventy-five feet high, and to-morrow ask the king for leave to have Mordecai hanged on it."

That seemed good to Haman, and he caused the gallows to be erected, and he went in merrily with the king to the queen's banquet.

Now, the night before, the king had not been able to sleep, and he gave orders to have brought to him the book of the records of the events of his reign; and one read to him out of the book. And there it was written how, one time, Mordecai had saved his life from two assassins.

The king said, "What honor and dignity have been bestowed on Mordecai for this?"

The reader said, "Nothing has been done for him."

Then Haman came to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai. And the king's servants said to him, "Haman is standing in the court." The king said, "Let him come in." So Haman came in.

And the king said, "Haman, what shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?"

And Haman said to himself, "To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself?" So he said, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal apparel be brought, such as the king wears, and the horse on which the king rides, and the crown royal which is set upon his head; and let the apparel and the horse be delivered into the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor; and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him, 'Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delights to honor.'"

Then the king said to Haman, "Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew!"

And Haman did so. Mordecai was brought on horseback

through the streets of the city, and proclamation was made before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor."

But Haman's heart was filled with bitterness and dread. Still, he went to the queen's banquet. And the king said to the queen, "What is your petition, Queen Esther, and what is your request? It shall be performed, even to the half of my kingdom."

And Esther said, "O king, give me my life, and the lives of my people. We are sold, I and my people, to be slain and to perish!"

"Who is he," said the king, "and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?"

And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!"

Then they took Haman. And one of the king's officers said, "There is a gallows seventy-five feet high which Haman made for Mordecai who saved your life. There it stands beside the house of Haman."

The king said, "Hang him on it."

So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. And the Jews were delivered.

XXXIX

THE CASTLE WALL

OU are not sick, Nehemiah," said the king to his cupbearer. "Why do you look so sad?"

And Nehemiah answered, "O king, why should I not be sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates are destroyed by fire?"

The king said, "Have you a request to make of me?"

Then Nehemiah prayed silently to God, and said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor in your eyes, send me to Judah, to the Castle of Zion, to the city where my fathers are buried, that I may rebuild the walls."

"How long will your journey be?" said the king. "And when will you return?"

And Nehemiah set a time, and the king let him go.

And Nehemiah said, "If it please the king, let me have letters to the governors beyond the river, that they may let me pass through to Judah; and tell the keeper of the

royal forest to give me timber to make beams for the gates of the castle, and for houses."

This also the king did, and the king sent a bodyguard of horsemen with him.

Now the king who thus befriended Nehemiah and the Jews was king of Persia. As the Assyrians had been conquered by the Chaldeans, and their capital Nineveh had been destroyed, so the Chaldeans in their turn had been conquered by the Persians, who had destroyed their capital city, Babylon. Great Babylon had fallen, and the long captivity of the Jews was over. They had been permitted to return, and a long procession, bearing the gold and silver vessels of the Temple, had gone back over the road along which their fathers had been taken into exile. But the times were bad, and the work was hard, and for some years they attended only to the building of their own houses. The Temple lay in ruins. Then two good men, Haggai and Zachariah, urged the people till they erected a new temple. But the city had no walls or gates.

So Nehemiah came to Jerusalem; and for three days he looked about him, as if he were a visitor. He told nobody that the king of Persia had made him governor of the land.

On the night of the third day, in the light of the shining moon, he took a few men with him, and rode out of the

Valley Gates to view the walls. He went as far as the Dragon's Well, looking at the ruins. There broken stones were piled so high that his horse could go no farther, but he went on foot. Then he turned back, and entered again into the city; and none of the rulers knew where he had been, or what he did.

The next day, he called an assembly of the people. "You see," he said, "the distress in which we are, how the walls of the Castle of Zion are in ruins, and the gates are burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall." And Nehemiah told them how God had cared for him, and how the king had given his permission.

And the people said, "Let us rise up and build!"

But there were certain men in Jerusalem, headed by Sanballat and Tobiah, who were much displeased that Nehemiah should have come to take the lead of them. They were such men as had opposed Haggai and Zachariah in their efforts to rebuild the Temple. They desired to be let alone. They wished to improve their own fortunes, and to live their own selfish lives. And they opposed Nehemiah. At first, they laughed at him. Then they accused him of intending to rebel against the king.

Most of the people, however, were on Nehemiah's side. The priests rebuilded the Sheep Gate. The goldsmiths and

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the merchants undertook to do their share. Men came to work from all the villages around the city. Others set about repairing the parts of the wall which were near their own houses.

Meanwhile, Sanballat was stirring up enemies among the Samaritans and the Ammonites. "What are these feeble Jews doing?" he cried. "Will they take up the stones out of the heaps of rubbish which are burned?"

And Tobiah said, "Look at the wall which they are building! If a fox should jump upon it, he would break it down."

And they came to fight against Jerusalem, to stop the progress of the work.

But Nehemiah armed the people with swords and spears and bows. "Be not afraid of them," he said. "Remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your sons and daughters, and your wives, and your houses." So half of the men labored in the work, and the other half stood guard with their weapons. And the builders and the burden-bearers had every man his sword girded by his side. And beside Nehemiah was a man with a trumpet.

And Nehemiah said to the nobles and the rulers and the rest of the people, "The work is great and large, and we are separated on the wall, one far from another. When you

hear the sound of the trumpet, leave your work and come together to me." So they labored day and night, and Nehemiah and his bodyguard kept watch, and when they slept, they slept in their clothes, with their spears beside them.

And there were other troubles. The stones were heavy, and the rubbish heaps were great, and the men grew very tired. Moreover, their own work in the fields had to be neglected. They could neither plant nor reap. Thus their farms gave them no food. But there were selfish neighbors who sold them food at such high prices that they had to mortgage their land and their houses, and even to sell their sons and daughters into slavery, in order to buy it and live. Thus as the farmers and the poorer people grew poorer, the nobles grew richer.

Then Nehemiah was very angry. "I and my friends," he said, "have been taking our own money to redeem our countrymen who have been sold in slavery to the heathen; and you are making money by selling them. I and my friends have been lending them money and grain; and you are taking away their lands and houses. Come, now, stop this injustice. Give them back their fields and vineyards, and their sons and daughters."

They said, "We will restore them; we will require no-

thing of them. We will do just as you say." So that evil was ended.

Then Sanballat and Tobiah laid a plot. They sent to Nehemiah and said, "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages, and hold a conference." But they meant to take him prisoner.

Nehemiah answered, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

Then they bribed a prophet who came to Nehemiah and said, "Men are coming to-night to kill you. Go now into the Temple and shut the door against them."

Nehemiah said, "Should such a man as I flee?" And he would not do it.

Thus at last, in the face of all opposition, the walls of the Castle of Zion were rebuilt. Strong they stood against all enemies, and watchmen guarded the gates. So Nehemiah finished the noble work which he had come to do, and returned to Persia to the king, his master.

XL

THE ADVENTURES OF JONAH

THE Jews had been held in subjection by the Assyrians first; then by the Chaldeans, then by the Persians. After these conquerors came the Greeks. All these strong, oppressive nations they called Gentiles; and they hated the Gentiles. They felt that nothing was too bad for them. They prayed that the wrath of God might fall upon them. They hoped that they would be punished both in this world and in the world to come.

There were some Jews, however, who believed that God is the Father of all the people of the world, and that all the Gentiles are His children. One of them wrote a story about Jonah.

Once upon a time there was a man named Jonah. He lived so long ago that in his day old Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians, was standing in its pride. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me."

But Jonah would not do it. He knew that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. And he said to himself, "If I obey this word, and go to Nineveh, and preach as the Lord bids me, this is what will happen. The people will repent, and God will forgive them, and bless them. Far be it from me to be the means of bringing a blessing on those accursed Gentiles of Nineveh!"

So Jonah rose up, and started to go in exactly the opposite direction. The Lord told him to go east, and he went west. The Lord sent him across the plains to Nineveh, but he found a ship at Joppa, on the Mediterranean Sea, and took his passage for Tarshish, on the coast of Spain. He paid his fare, and went on board the ship; the sails were spread, and off they went. And Jonah thought that he had escaped from God.

But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest, so that the ship was like to be broken. And the sailors were afraid, and cried every man to his god; and the goods which they were carrying, they cast into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah was fast asleep.

At last, when the wreck of the ship seemed certain, the captain went down and awakened Jonah. "Sleeper," he said, "do you not hear the roaring of the storm. Get up, and call upon your God, for we are like to perish."

So Jonah awoke, and the ship was swinging like a swing, up to the heaven and down again to the depths, and the sailors were reeling to and fro, and staggering like drunken men, and were at their wits' end.

"Come," they cried, "let us cast lots that we know for whose cause this evil is upon us."

And when the lots were cast, the lot fell on Jonah.

The sailors said, "What is your business? Where do you come from? What is your country? What have you done?"

And Jonah confessed that he was trying to escape from the Lord his God.

Then the sailors were exceedingly afraid. The wind howled about them, and the sky was black above them, and the waves roared against the ship.

"Why have you done this thing?" they cried. "What shall we do?"

Jonah said, "The thing to do is to take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; then shall the waves be still, for I know that this storm is for my sake."

Nevertheless, the good Gentiles of the crew did what they could to save the life of the bad prophet. They rowed hard to bring the boat to land, but they could not, for the wind blew against them. At last, they prayed to the God of Jonah

to be good to them, and they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea. And the waves ceased from roaring.

As for Jonah, a great fish swallowed him, and then threw him up on the dry land. So he went home.

Then the word of the Lord came a second time to Jonah, and he obeyed. The Lord said, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." And Jonah arose, and went to Nineveh.

And Jonah cried in all the streets of Nineveh, and in the market squares and wheresoever there were people gathered together; and he said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

And the people of Nineveh harkened to the voice of Jonah. The king and his nobles made a proclamation, and the heralds who proclaimed it went through all the streets where Jonah had gone preaching, and they cried, "Thus saith the king, 'Let no man or beast in Nineveh taste food or drink water, but let all cry mightily to God, and let them turn every one from his evil way.'"

So the whole city prayed and fasted, and all the sinners put away their sins. Before the forty days were over, the bad city had become good. And God was pleased.

In the mean time, Jonah had gone out of the city, and had built himself a little hut on the east side, where he

might sit in the shade, and see what would become of Nineveh. And he counted the slow days, — one, and two, and three, and ten, and twenty, and thirty, and thirty-eight, and then thirty-nine, and at last forty. As the sun rose on the morning of the fortieth day, Jonah stood in the door of his hut, and looked eagerly into the sky for clouds. But the sky was clear and blue. And Jonah prayed. He prayed for thunder and lightning; he prayed for an earthquake or a whirlwind: anything to destroy the city! But the sun shone over Jonah's head at noon, and sank quietly into the west at night, and nothing happened. All the stars came out, and the fortieth day was ended, and there was Nineveh sound and safe. And Jonah perceived that Nineveh was not to be overthrown.

And it displeased Jonah greatly, and he was very angry. He reproved God. "O Lord," he said, "this is what I told you before I came. This is why I fled to Tarshish. I knew that those miserable Gentiles would repent, and that if they repented you would forgive them. I have been the means of bringing a blessing on people whom I hate! O Lord, take my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

Now, over Jonah's hut had grown a gourd, and it made a pleasant shade over his head, but in the morning a worm

attacked it, and it withered. And the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, and the east wind blew hot upon him.

And again Jonah wished that he was dead. "It is better for me to die," he said, "than to live."

The Lord said, "Doest thou well to be angry on account of the gourd?"

And Jonah answered, "I do well to be angry, even unto death."

Then said the Lord, "You care for the gourd, which you did not plant, neither did you make it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. Do you not see that I must care for Nineveh, that great city, wherein are thousands of people so ignorant that they do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

XLI

THE PATIENCE OF JOB

O the Castle of Zion was held by one great master after another: after the Assyrians, the Chaldeans; after the Chaldeans, the Persians; after the Persians, the Greeks. When at last the king came, the King of Kings, He found the castle in the possession of the Romans. The Jews lived there still, but the Gentiles governed them and oppressed them.

And this was in spite of the fact that they were really trying to be good. They could not understand it. They said, "Our fathers did wickedly, and were punished: they were carried into exile. What have we done?" Then somebody wrote a story about Job.

Once upon a time there was a man named Job; and he was a perfect and upright man, who feared God and did no evil.

He had seven sons and three daughters, and seven thousand sheep and three thousand camels, and a very great household, so that he was the greatest of all the men of the

East. Every morning Job rose up early and prayed for himself, and for his sons and daughters. This he did continually.

Now there was a day when the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came among the angels.

And the Lord said to Satan, "Where have you been?"

And Satan answered, "I have been going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it."

The Lord said, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, who fears God and does no evil?"

And Satan answered, "Does Job fear God for nought? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his wealth increases every day. Take away this, and he will curse you to your face."

And the Lord said, "All that he has is in your power; only upon himself put not forth your hand."

And the next day there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were ploughing and the asses feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them away; and they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword, and I only am escaped alone to tell you."

And while he was speaking, there came also another, and said, "The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and has burned

up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell you."

While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell you."

While he was yet speaking there came also another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking in their eldest brother's house; and behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men and they were dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell you."

Then Job arose, and laid hold upon his clothes and tore them in distress, and he fell upon the ground and worshipped God. "The Lord gave," he said, "and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."

Again there was a day when the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came among the angels.

And the Lord said to Satan, "Where have you been?"

And Satan answered, "I have been going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down upon it."

The Lord said, "Have you considered my servant Job,

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that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, who fears God and does no evil? And still he holds fast his goodness, though you moved Me against him to destroy him without a cause."

And Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin, all that a man has will he give for his life. But put forth your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face."

And the Lord said to Satan, "He is in your hand; but save his life."

And the next day, Job was smitten with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a potsherd to scrape himself, and sat down among the ashes. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God," he said, "and shall we not receive evil?"

Now there were three friends of Job who heard that he was sick and came to see him. They came to mourn with him, and to comfort him. And they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word to him; for they saw that his grief was very great.

At last Job lifted up his voice, and lamented the day when he was born, and his friends, one after another, answered him. They all said, "Job, what sin have you committed, what dreadful evil have you done, that all this loss and pain

has come upon you?" For they believed that all trouble is a punishment of God for the wickedness of men.

But Job declared that he had done nothing; he had served God and lived uprightly.

His friends would not believe it. "Come, Job," they said, "make a confession and repent, and God will forgive you and restore your goods and your health."

And Job said, "I know not why this distress has overtaken me. I know not why God has permitted me to be afflicted. But this I say: Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

At last, came a mighty whirlwind, and out of the midst of it God spoke. He rebuked Job's friends. "Life," he said, "is filled with mystery. Man is ignorant, and only God is wise. The plans of God are beyond man's understanding. Pain and grief come, sometimes upon the sinful, sometimes upon the innocent: God alone knows why." And God blessed Job, because in his poverty and suffering he had kept his faith in Him.

And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before, fourteen thousand sheep and six thousand camels; and again he had seven sons and three daughters. So he lived a long life, full of peace and happiness, and died when he was old and full of days.

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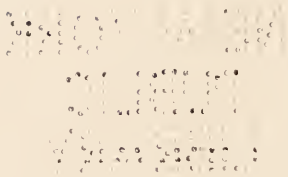

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